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MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS

IN THIS ISSUE

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BARRY PEROWNE

MELVILLE DAVISSON POST

FREDRIC BROWN

LESLIE CHARTERIS

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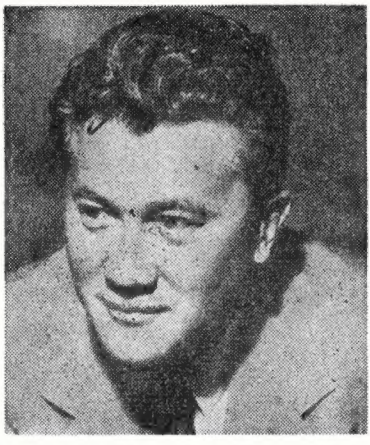
SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION



In September, the United States celebrates a national holiday called Labor Day, for no profound reason that I am aware of except that it is still more than three months till Christmas. The British are more honest about it, with their August Bank Holiday, but the basically puritanical American mentality is compelled to assign a Good Cause to every enjoyment, and therefore claims that this coast-to-coast goof-off is intended (I quote my *Columbia-Viking Desk Encyclopedia*, from which emanates so much of my deceptive omniscience) "to honor the workingman".

Nevertheless, Labor Day, with shocking un-Americanism, shares one predominant feature with the May Day festivities of Communist countries and organizations, which also profess to pay tribute to the noble toiler: they are both occasions when the workers decline to work.

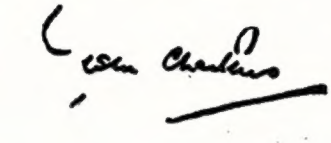
In my ingenuous way, I should have thought that a truly exemplary proletarian would have proved his dedication by working double time for half pay, or even for nothing. I am happy to offer this suggestion to the Master Planners in the Kremlin, and to waive my claim to the royalty which they would not pay anyhow.

I can only afford to be so generous because I am not expecting any competitive offers from the labor unions of the free world, which are already preoccupied with reducing their working hours per day and working days per week, besides safeguarding the rights of supernumeraries who must be fully paid for not working at all.

It can be quite restful to be so unanimously ignored and I am frequently grateful not to be the struggling victim of concerted drives to enroll me in one regimented movement or another. It is a small consolation for the indignity of not being regarded as a workingman, according to the arrogant definition of the socialist cardio-hemophile, under which "work" is measured in units of physical sweat. It is probably too late now to reverse the triumph of semantic bamboozlement which has succeeded in popularly ostracizing the executive, the clerk, the shopkeeper, and the member of any intellectual profession, who have usually put in more strenuous training and give more time to their vocation (not to be called "work") than any union member, from the heroic ranks of the "working classes". The damage has been done, and we are stuck with it.

Most unfortunate of all, perhaps, is the use of the word "royalty" to describe an artist's percentage from the exploitation of his product. Yet I would love to know how many "workingmen" would agree to lay bricks, for instance, for months and years, with no pay, but merely in hopes of a percentage on the sale of the structure—if and when it sold.

Personally, I always join the Workers on Labor Day—not working.



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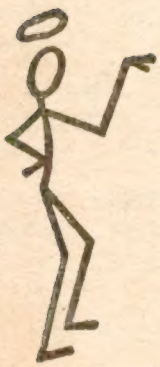

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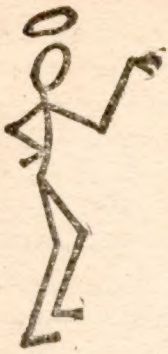

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the arrow of god

by . . . Leslie Charteris

Everyone had a motive—as everyone should, in a nice lethal mystery . . .

ONE OF Simon Templar's stock criticisms of the classic type of detective story is that the victim of the murder, the reluctant spark plug of all the entertaining mystery and strife, is usually a mere nonentity who wanders vaguely through the first few pages with the sole purpose of becoming a convenient body in the library by the end of Chapter One. But whatever his own feelings and problems may have been, the personality which has to provide so many people with adequate motives for desiring him to drop dead is largely a matter of hearsay, retrospectively brought out in the conventional process of drawing attention to one suspect after another.

"You could almost," Simon has said, "call him a *corpus derelecti*... Actually, the physical murder should only be the midpoint of the story: the things that led up to it are at least as interesting as the mechanical solution of who done it... Personally, I've killed very few people that I didn't know plenty about first."

Coming from a man who is generally regarded as almost a detective-story character himself, this comment is at least worth recording for reference; but it certainly did not apply to the shuffling off of Mr. Floyd Vosper, which caused a brief commotion on the

THE SAINT NEVER TRIED TO BE A DETECTIVE, BUT EVERY SO OFTEN HE GOT STUCK WITH IT.

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island of New Providence in the early spring of that year.

Why Simon Templar should have been in Nassau (which, for the benefit of the untraveled, is the city of New Providence, which is an island in the Bahamas) at the time is one of those questions which always arise in stories about him, and which can only be answered by repeating that he liked to travel and was just as likely to show up there as in Nova Zembla or Namaqualand. As for why he should have been invited to the house of Mrs. Herbert H. Wexall, that is another irrelevancy which is hardly covered by the fact that he could just as well have shown up at the house of Joe Wallenski (of the arsonist Wallenskis) or the White House—he had friends in many places, legitimate and otherwise. But Mrs. Wexall had some international renown as a lion hunter, even if her stalking had been confined to the variety which roars loudest in plush drawing rooms; and it was not to be expected that the advent of such a creature as Simon Templar would have escaped the attention of her salon safari.

Thus one noontime Simon found himself strolling up the driveway and into what little was left of the life of Floyd Vosper. Naturally he did not know this at the time; nor did he know Floyd Vosper, except by name. In this he was no different from at least fifty million other people in that hemisphere; for Floyd Vosper was not only one of the most widely syndicated pundits of the day, but his books (*Feet of Clay, As I Saw Them,* and *The Twenty Worst Men in the World*) had all been the selections of one book club or another and still sold by the millions in reprints. For Mr. Vosper specialized in the ever-popular sport of shattering reputations. In his journalistic years he had met, and apparently had unique opportunities to study, practically every great name in the national and international scene, and could unerringly remember everything in their biographies that they would prefer forgotten, and could impale and epitomize all their weaknesses with devastatingly pin-point precision, leaving them naked and squirming on the operating table of his vocabulary. But what this merciless professional iconoclast was like as a person, Simon had never heard or bothered much to wonder about.

So the first impression that Vosper made on him was a voice, a still unidentified voice, a dry and deliberate and peculiarly needling voice, which came from behind a bank of riotous hibiscus and oleander.

"My dear Janet," it said, "you must not let your innocent admiration for Reggie's bulging biceps color your estimate of his perspicacity in world affairs. The title of All-American, I hate to disillusion you, has no reference to statesmanship."

There was a rather strained

laugh that must have come from Reggie, and a girl's clear young voice said: "That isn't fair, Mr. Vosper. Reggie doesn't pretend to be a genius, but he's bright enough to have a wonderful job waiting for him on Wall Street."

"I don't doubt that he will make an excellent contact man for the more stupid clients," conceded the voice with the measured nasal gripe. "And I'm sure that his education can cope with the simple arithmetic of the Stock Exchange, just as I'm sure it can grasp the basic figures of your father's Dun and Bradstreet. This should not dazzle you with his brilliance, any more than it should make you believe that you have some spiritual fascination that lured him to your feet."

At this point Simon rounded a curve in the driveway and caught his first sight of the speakers, all of whom looked up at him with reserved curiosity and two thirds of them with a certain hint of relief.

There was no difficulty in assigning them to their lines—the young redheaded giant with the pleasantly rugged face and the slim pretty blonde girl, who sat at a wrought-iron table on the terrace in front of the house with a broken deck of cards in front of them which established an interrupted game of gin rummy, and the thin stringy man reclining in a long cane chair with a cigarette holder in one hand and a highball glass in the other.

Simon smiled and said: "Hullo. This is Mrs. Wexall's house, is it?"

The girl said: "Yes," and he said: "My name's Templar, and I was invited here."

The girl jumped up and said: "Oh, yes. Lucy told me. I'm her sister, Janet Blaise. This is my fiance, Reg Herrick. And Mr. Vosper."

Simon shook hands with the two men, and Janet said: "I think Lucy's on the beach. I'll take you around."

Vosper unwound his bony length from the long chair, looking like a slightly dissolute and acidulated mahatma in his white shorts and burnt chocolate tan.

"Let me do it," he said. "I'm sure you two ingenues would rather be alone together. And I need another drink."

He led the way, not into the house but around it, by a flagged path which struck off to the side and meandered through a bower of scarlet poinciana. A breeze rustled in the leaves and mixed flower scents with the sweetness of the sea. Vosper smoothed down his sparse gray hair; and Simon was aware that the man's beady eyes and sharp thin nose were cocked towards him with brash speculation, as if he were already measuring another target for his tongue.

"Templar," he said. "Of course, you must be the Saint—the fellow they call the Robin Hood of modern crime."

"I see you read the right papers," said the Saint pleasantly.

"I read all the papers," Vosper said, "in order to keep in touch with the vagaries of vulgar taste. I've often wondered why the Robin Hood legend should have so much romantic appeal. Robin Hood, as I understand it, was a bandit who indulged in some well-publicized charity—but not, as I recall, at the expense of his own stomach. A good many unscrupulous promoters have also become generous—and with as much shrewd publicity—when their ill-gotten gains exceeded their personal spending capacity, but I don't remember that they succeeded in being glamorized for it."

"There may be some difference," Simon suggested, "in who was robbed to provide the surplus spoils."

"Then," Vosper said challengingly, "you consider yourself an infallible judge of who should be penalized and who should be rewarded."

"Oh, no," said the Saint modestly. "Not at all. No more, I'm sure, than you would call yourself the infallible judge of all the people whom you dissect so definitively in print."

He felt the other's probing glance stab at him suspiciously and almost with puzzled incredulity, as if Vosper couldn't quite accept the idea that anyone had actually dared to cross swords with him, and moreover might have scored on the riposte—or if it had happened at all, that it had been anything but a semantic accident. But the Saint's easily inscrutable poise gave no clue to the answer at all; and before anything further could develop there was a paragraphic distraction.

This took the form of a man seated on top of a truncated column which for reasons best known to the architect had been incorporated into the design of a wall which curved out from the house to encircle a portion of the shore like a possessive arm. The man had long curly hair that fell to his shoulders, which with his delicate ascetic features would have made him look more like a woman if it had not been complemented with an equally curly and silken beard. He sat cross-legged and upright, his hands folded symmetrically in his lap, staring straight out into the blue sky a little above the horizon, so motionless and almost rigid that he might easily have been taken for a tinted statue except for the fluttering of the long flowing white robe he wore.

After rolling with the first reasonable shock of the apparition, Simon would have passed on politely without comment, but the opportunity was irresistible for Vosper to display his virtuosity again, and perhaps also to recover from his momentary confusion.

"That fugitive from a Turkish bath," Vosper said, in the manner of a tired guide to a geek show,

"calls himself Astron. He's a nature boy from the Dardanelles who just concluded a very successful season in Hollywood. He wears a beard to cover a receding chin, and long hair to cover a hole in the head. He purifies his soul with a diet of boiled grass and prune juice. Whenever this diet permits him, he meditates. After he was brought to the attention of the Western world by some engineers of the Anglo-Mongolian Oil Company, whom he cured of stomach ulcers by persuading them not to spike their ration of sacramental wine with rubbing alcohol, he began to meditate about the evils of earthly riches."

"Another member of our club?" Simon prompted innocuously.

"Astron maintains," Vosper said, leaning against the pillar and giving out as oracularly as if the object of his dissertation were not sitting on it at all, "that the only way for the holders of worldly wealth to purify themselves is to get rid of as much of it as they can spare. Being himself so pure that it hurts, he is unselfishly ready to become the custodian of as much corrupting cabbage as they would like to get rid of. Of course, he would have no part of it himself, but he will take the responsibility of parking it in a shrine in the Sea of Marmora which he plans to build as soon as there is enough kraut in the kitty."

The figure on the column finally moved. Without any waste motion it simply expanded its crossed legs like a lazy tongs until it towered at its full height over them.

"You have heard the blasphemer," it said. "But I say to you that his words are dust in the wind, as he himself is dust among the stars that I see."

"I'm a blasphemer," Vosper repeated to the Saint, with a sort of derisive pride combined with the ponderous bonhomie of a vaudeville old-timer in a routine with a talking dog. He looked back up at the figure of the white-robed mystic towering above him, and said: "So if you have this direct pipe line to the Almighty, why don't you strike me dead?"

"Life and death are not in my hands," Astron said, in a calm and confident voice. "Death can only come from the hands of the Giver of all Life. In His own good time He will strike you down, and the arrow of God will silence your mockeries. This I have seen in the stars."

"Quaint, isn't he?" Vosper said, and opened the gate between the wall and the beach.

Beyond the wall a few steps led down to a kind of Grecian courtyard open on the seaward side, where the paving merged directly into the white sand of the beach. The courtyard was furnished with gaily colored lounging chairs and a well-stocked pushcart bar, to which Vosper immediately directed himself.

"You have visitors, Lucy," he said, without letting it interfere

with the important work of reviving his highball.

Out on the sand, on a towel spread under an enormous beach umbrella, Mrs. Herbert Wexall rolled over and said: "Oh, Mr. Templar."

Simon went over and shook hands with her as she stood up.

It was rather hard to think of her as Janet Blaise's sister, for there were at least twenty years between them and hardly any physical resemblances. She was a big woman with an open homely face and patchily sun-bleached hair and a sloppy figure, but she made a virtue of those disadvantages by the cheerfulness with which she ignored them. She was what is rather inadequately known as "a person," which means that she had the personality to dispense with appearances and the money to back it up.

"Good to see you," she said, and turned to the man who had been sitting beside her, as he struggled to his feet. "Do you know Arthur Gresson?"

Mr. Gresson was a full head shorter than the Saint's six foot two, but he weighed a good deal more. Unlike anyone else that Simon had encountered on the premises so far, his skin looked as if it was unaccustomed to exposure. His round belly and his round balding brow, under a liberal sheen of oil, had the hot rosy blush which the kiss of the sun evokes in virgin epidermis.

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Templar." His hand was soft and earnestly adhesive.

"I expect you'd like a drink," Lucy Wexall said. "Let's keep Floyd working."

They joined Vosper at the bar wagon, and after he had started to work on the orders she turned back to the Saint and said: "After this formal service, just make yourself at home. I'm so glad you could come."

"I'm sure Mr. Templar will be happy," Vosper said. "He's a man of the world like me. We enjoy Lucy's food and liquor, and in return we give her the pleasure of hitting the society columns with our names. A perfectly business-like exchange."

"That's progress for you," Lucy Wexall said breezily. "In the old days I'd have had a court jester. Now all I get is a professional stinker."

"That's no way to refer to Arthur," Vosper said, handing Simon a long cold glass. "For your information, Templar, Mr. Gresson— Mr. Arthur *Granville* Gresson—is a promoter. He has a long history of selling phony oil stock behind him. He is just about to take Herb Wexall for another sucker; but since Herb married Lucy he can afford it. Unless you're sure you can take Janet away from Reggie, I advise you not to listen to him."

Arthur Gresson's elbow nudged Simon's ribs.

"What a character!" he said.

"I only give out with facts," Vosper said. "My advice to you, Templar, is, never be an elephant. Resist all inducements. Because when you reach back into that memory, you will only be laughed at, and the people who should thank you will call you a stinker."

Gresson giggled, deep from his round pink stomach.

"Would you like to get in a swim before lunch?" Lucy Wexall said. "Floyd, show him where he can change."

"A pleasure," Vosper said. "And probably a legitimate part of the bargain."

He thoughtfully refilled his glass before he steered Simon by way of the veranda into the beachward side of the house, and into a bedroom. He sat on the bed and watched unblinkingly while Simon stripped down and pulled on the trunks he had brought with him.

"It must be nice to have the Body Beautiful," he observed. "Of course, in your business it almost ranks with plant and machinery, doesn't it?"

The Saint's blue eyes twinkled.

"The main difference," he agreed good-humoredly, "is that if I get a screw loose it may not be so noticeable."

As they were starting back through the living room, a small bird-like man in a dark and (for the setting outside the broad picture window) incongruous business suit bustled in by another door. He had the bright baggy eyes behind rimless glasses, the slack but fleshless jowls, and the wide tight mouth which may not be common to all lawyers, bankers, and business executives, but which is certainly found in very few other vocations; and he was followed by a statuesque brunette whose severe tailoring failed to disguise an outstanding combination of curves, who carried a notebook and a sheaf of papers.

"Herb!" Vosper said. "I want you to meet Lucy's latest addition to the menagerie which already contains Astron and me— Mr. Simon Templar, known as the Saint. Templar—your host, Mr. Wexall."

"Pleased to meet you," said Herbert Wexall, shaking hands briskly.

"And this is Pauline Stone," Vosper went on, indicating the nubile brunette. "The tired business man's consolation. Whatever Lucy can't supply, she can."

"How do you do," said the girl stoically.

Her dark eyes lingered momentarily on the Saint's torso, and he noticed that her mouth was very full and soft.

"Going for a swim?" Wexall said, as if he had heard nothing. "Good. Then I'll see you at lunch, in a few minutes."

He trotted busily on his way, and Vosper ushered the Saint to the beach by another flight of steps that led directly down from the veranda. The house com-

manded a small half-moon bay, and both ends of the crescent of sand were guarded naturally by abrupt rises of jagged coral rock.

"Herbert is the living example of how really stupid a successful business man can be," Vosper said tirelessly. "He was just an office boy of some kind in the Blaise outfit when he got smart enough to woo and win the boss's daughter. And from that flying start he was clever enough to really pay his way by making Blaise Industries twice as big as even the old man himself had been able to do. And yet he's dumb enough to think that Lucy won't catch on to the extracurricular functions of that busty secretary sooner or later —or that when she does he won't be out on a cold doorstep in the rain ... No, I'm not going in. I'll hold your drink for you."

Simon ran down into the surf and churned seawards for a couple of hundred yards, then turned over and paddled lazily back, coordinating his impressions with idle amusement. The balmy water was still refreshing after the heat of the morning, and when he came out the breeze had become brisk enough to give him the luxury of a fleeting shiver as the wetness started to evaporate from his tanned skin.

He crossed the sand to the Greek patio, where Floyd Vosper was on duty again at the bar in a strategic position to keep his own needs supplied with a minimum of effort. Discreet servants were setting up a buffet table. Janet Blaise and Reg Herrick had transferred their gin rummy game and were playing at a table right under the column where Astron had resumed his seat and his cataleptic meditations—a weird juxtaposition of which the three members all seemed equally unconscious.

Simon took Lucy Wexall a Martini and said with another glance at the tableau: "Where did you find him?"

"The people who brought him to California sent him to me when he had to leave the States. They gave me such a good time when I was out there, I couldn't refuse to do something for them. He's writing a book, you know, and of course he can't go back to that dreadful place he came from, wherever it is, before he has a chance to finish it in reasonable comfort."

Simon avoided discussing this assumption, but he said: "What's it like, having a resident prophet in the house?"

"He's very interesting. And quite as drastic as Floyd, in his own way, in summing up people. You ought to talk to him."

Arthur Gresson came over with an hors d'oeuvre plate of smoked salmon and stuffed eggs from the buffet. He said: "Anyone you meet at Lucy's is interesting, Mr. Templar. But if you don't mind my saying so, you have it all over the rest of 'em. Who'd ever think we'd find the Saint looking for crime in the Bahamas?"

"I hope no one will think I'm looking for crime," Simon said deprecatingly, "any more than I take it for granted that you're looking for oil."

"That's where you'd be wrong," Gresson said. "As a matter of fact, I am."

The Saint raised an eyebrow.

"Well, I can always learn something. I'd never heard of oil in the Bahamas."

"I'm not a bit surprised. But you will, Mr. Templar, you will." Gresson sat down, pillowing his round stomach on his thighs. "Just think for a moment about some of the places you have heard of, where there is certainly oil. Let me mention them in a certain order: Mexico, Texas, Louisiana, and the recent strike in the Florida Everglades. We might even include Venezuela in the south. Does that suggest anything to you?"

"Hm-mm," said the Saint thoughtfully.

"A pattern," Gresson said. "A vast central pool of oil somewhere under the Gulf of Mexico, with oil wells dipping into it from the edges of the bowl, where the geological strata have also been forced up. Now think of the islands of the Caribbean as the eastern edge of the same bowl. Why not?"

"It's an interesting theory," said the Saint.

"Mr. Wexall thinks so too, and I hope he's going into partnership with me."

"Herbert can afford it," intruded the metallic sneering voice of Floyd Vosper. "But before you decide to buy in, Templar, you'd better check with New York about the time when Mr. Gresson thought he could dig gold in the Catskills."

"Shut up, Floyd," said Mrs. Wexall, "and get me another Martini."

Arthur Gresson chuckled in his paunch like a happy Buddha.

"What a guy!" he said. "What a ribber. And he gets everyone mad. He kills me!"

Herbert Wexall came down from the veranda and beamed around. As a sort of tacit announcement that he had put aside his work for the day, he had changed into a sport shirt on which various exotic fish were depicted wandering through vines of seaweed, but he retained his business trousers and business shoes and business face.

"Well," he said, inspecting the buffet and addressing the world at large. "Let's come and get it whenever we're hungry."

As if a spell had been snapped, Astron removed himself from the contemplation of the infinite, descended from his pillar, and began to help himself to cottage cheese and caviar on a foundation of lettuce leaves.

Simon drifted in the same direction, and found Pauline Stone beside him, saying: "What do you feel like, Mr. Templar?"

Her indication of having come off duty was a good deal more

radical than her employer's. In fact, the bathing suit which she had changed into seemed to be based more on the French minimums of the period than on any British tradition. There was no doubt that she filled it opulently; and her question amplified its suggestiveness with undertones which the Saint felt it wiser not to challenge at that moment.

"There's so much to drool over," he said, referring studiously to the buffet table. "But that green turtle aspic looks pretty good to me."

She stayed with him when he carried his plate to a table as thoughtfully diameteric as possible from the berth chosen by Floyd Vosper, even though Astron had already settled there in temporary solitude. They were promptly joined by Reg Herrick and Janet Blaise, and slipped at once into an easy exchange of banalities.

But even then it was impossible to escape Vosper's tongue. It was not many minutes before his saw-edged voice whined across the patio above the general level of harmless chatter:

"When are you going to tell the Saint's fortune, Astron? That ought to be worth hearing."

There was a slightly embarrassed lull, and then everyone went on talking again; but Astron looked at the Saint with a gentle smile and said quietly: "You are a seeker after truth, Mr. Templar, as I am. But when instead of truth you find falsehood, you will destroy it with a sword. I only say, 'This is falsehood, and God will destroy it. Do not come too close, lest you be destroyed with it.'"

"Okay," Herrick growled, just as quietly. "But if you're talking about Vosper, it's about time someone destroyed it."

"Sometimes," Astron said, "God places his arrow in the hand of a man."

For a few moments that seemed unconscionably long nobody said anything; and then before the silence spread beyond their small group the Saint said casually: "Talking of arrows—I hear that the sport this season is to go hunting sharks with a bow and arrow."

Herrick nodded with a healthy grin.

"It's a lot of fun. Would you like to try it?"

"Reggie's terrific," Janet Blaise said. "He shoots like a regular Howard Hill, but of course he uses a bow that nobody else can pull."

"I'd like to try," said the Saint, and the conversation slid harmlessly along the tangent he had provided.

After lunch everyone went back to the beach, with the exception of Astron, who retired to put his morning's meditations on paper. Chatter surrendered to an afternoon torpor which even subdued Vosper.

An indefinite while later, Herrick aroused with a yell and plunged roaring into the sea, followed by Janet Blaise. They were followed by others, including the Saint. An interlude of aquatic

brawling developed somehow into a pickup game of touch football on the beach, which was delightfully confused by recurrent arguments about who was supposed to be on which of the unequal sides. This boisterous nonsense churned up enough sand for the still freshening breeze to spray over Floyd Vosper, who by that time had drunk enough to be trying to sleep under the big beach umbrella, to finally get the misanthropic oracle back on his feet.

"Perhaps," he said witheringly, "I had better get out of the way of you perennial juveniles before you convert me into a dune."

He stalked off along the beach and lay down again about a hundred yards away. Simon noticed him still there, flat on his face and presumably unconscious, when the game eventually broke up through a confused water-polo phase to leave everyone gasping and laughing and tripping on the patio with no immediate resurge of inspiration. It was the last time he saw the unpopular Mr. Vosper alive.

"Well," Arthur Gresson observed, mopping his short round body with a towel, "at least one of us seems to have enough sense to know when to lie down."

"And to choose the only partner who'd do it with him," Pauline added vaguely.

Herbert Wexall glanced along the beach in the direction that they both referred to, then glanced for further inspiration at the waterproof watch he was still wearing.

"It's almost cocktail time," he said. "How about it, anyone?"

His wife shivered, and said: "It's going to blow like a son-of-a-gun any minute. Let's all go in and get some clothes on first—then we'll be set for the evening. You'll stay for supper of course, Mr. Templar?"

"I hadn't planned to make a day of it," Simon protested diffidently, and was promptly overwhelmed from all quarters.

He found his way back to the room where he had left his clothes without the benefit of Floyd Vosper's chatty courier service, and made leisured and satisfactory use of the fresh-water shower and monogrammed towels. Even so, when he sauntered back into the living room, he almost had the feeling of being lost in a strange and empty house, for all the varied individuals who had peopled the stage so vividly and vigorously a short time before had vanished into other and unknown seclusions and had not yet returned.

He lighted a cigarette and strolled idly towards the picture window that overlooked the veranda and the sea. Everything around his solitude was so still, excepting the subsonic suggestion of distant movements within the house, that he was tempted to walk on tiptoe; and yet outside the broad pane of plate glass the fronds of cocoanut palms were fluttering in a thin febrile frenzy, and there were lacings of white cream on the incredible jade of the short waves

simmering on the beach.

He noticed, first, in what should have been a lazily sensual survey of the panorama, that the big beach umbrella was no longer where he had first seen it, down to his right outside the pseudo-Grecian patio. He saw, as his eye wandered on, that it had been moved a hundred yards or so to his left—in fact, to the very place where Floyd Vosper was still lying. It occurred to him first that Vosper must have moved it himself, except that no shade was needed in the brief and darkening twilight. After that he noticed that Vosper seemed to have turned over on his back; and then at last as the Saint focused his eyes he saw with a weird thrill that the shaft of the umbrella stood straight up out of the left side of Vosper's scrawny brown chest, not in the sand beside him at all, but like a gigantic pin that had impaled a strange and inelegant insect—or, in a fantastic phrase that was not Simon's at all, like the arrow of God.

Major Rupert Fanshire, the senior Superintendent of Police, which made him third in the local hierarchy after the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner, paid tribute to the importance of the case by taking personal charge of it. He was a slight pinkish blond man with rather large and very bright blue eyes and such a discreetly modulated voice that it commanded rapt attention through the basic effort of trying to hear what it was saying. He sat at an ordinary writing desk in the living room, with a Bahamian sergeant standing stiffly beside him, and contrived to turn the whole room into an office in which seven previously happy-go-lucky adults wriggled like guilty schoolchildren whose teacher has been found libelously caricatured on their blackboard.

He said, with wholly impersonal conciseness: "Of course, you all know by now that Mr. Vosper was found on the beach with the steel spike of an umbrella through his chest. My job is to find out how it happened. To start with, the topography suggests that the person responsible came from, or through, this house. I've heard all your statements, and all they seem to amount to is that each of you was going about his own business at the time when this might have happened."

"All I know," Herbert Wexall said, "is that I was in my study, reading and signing the letters that I dictated this morning."

"And I was getting dressed," said his wife.

"So was I," said Janet Blaise.

"I guess I was in the shower," said Reginald Herrick.

"I was having a bubble bath," said Pauline Stone.

"I was still working," said Astron. "This morning I started a new chapter of my book—in my mind, you understand. I do not write by putting everything on paper. For me it is necessary to medi-

tate, to feel, to open floodgates in my mind, so that I can receive the wisdom that comes from beyond the—"

"Quite," Major Fanshire assented politely. "The point is that none of you have alibis, if you need them. You were all going about your own business, in your own rooms. Mr. Templar was changing in the late Mr. Vosper's room—"

"I wasn't here," Arthur Gresson said recklessly. "I drove back to my own place—I'm staying at the Fort Montagu Beach Hotel. I wanted a clean shirt. I drove back there, and when I came back here all this had happened."

"There's not much difference," Major Fanshire said. "Dr. Rassin tells me we couldn't establish the time of death within an hour or two, anyway ... So the next thing we come to is the question of motive. Did anyone here," Fanshire said almost innocently, "have any really serious trouble with Mr. Vosper?"

There was an uncomfortable silence, which the Saint finally broke by saying: "I'm an outsider, so I'll take the rap. I'll answer for everyone."

The Superintendent cocked his bright eyes.

"Very well, sir. What would you say?"

"My answer," said the Saint, "is —everybody."

There was another silence, but a very different one, in which it seemed, surprisingly, as if all of them relaxed as unanimously as they had stiffened before. And yet, in its own way, this relaxation was as self-conscious and uncomfortable as the preceding tension had been. Only the Saint, who had every attitude of the completely careless onlooker, and Major Fanshire, whose deferential patience was impregnably correct, seemed immune to the interplay of hidden strains.

"Would you care to go any further?" Fanshire asked.

"Certainly," said the Saint. "I'll go anywhere. I can say what I like, and I don't have to care whether anyone is on speaking terms with me tomorrow. I'll go on record with my opinion that the late Mr. Vosper was one of the most unpleasant characters I've ever met. I'll make the statement, if it isn't already general knowledge, that he made a specialty of needling everyone he spoke to or about. He goaded everyone with nasty little things that he knew, or thought he knew, about them. I wouldn't blame anyone here for wanting, at least theoretically, to kill him."

"I'm not exactly concerned with your interpretation of blame," Fanshire said detachedly. "But if you have any facts, I'd like to hear them."

"I have no facts," said the Saint coolly. "I only know that in the few hours I've been here, Vosper made statements to me, a stranger, about everyone here, any one of which could be called fighting words."

"You will have to be more specific," Fanshire said.

"Okay," said the Saint. "I apologize in advance to anyone it hurts. Remember, I'm only repeating the kind of thing that made Vosper a good murder candidate... I am now specific. In my hearing he called Reg Herrick a dumb athlete who was trying to marry Janet Blaise for her money. He suggested that Janet was a stupid juvenile for taking him seriously. He called Astron a commercial charlatan. He implied that Lucy Wexall was a dope and a snob. He inferred that Herb Wexall had more use for his secretary's sex than for her stenography, and he thought out loud that Pauline was amenable. He called Mr. Gresson a crook to his face."

"And during all this," Fanshire said, with an inoffensiveness that had to be heard to be believed, "he said nothing about you?"

"He did indeed," said the Saint. "He analyzed me, more or less, as a flamboyant phony."

"And you didn't object to that?"

"I hardly could," Simon replied blandly, "after I'd hinted to him I thought he was even phonier."

It was a line on which a stage audience could have tittered, but the tensions of the moment let it sink with a slow thud.

Fanshire drew down his upper lip with one forefinger and nibbled it inscrutably.

"I expect this bores you as much as it does me, but this is the job I'm paid for. I've got to say that all of you had the opportunity, and from what Mr. Templar says you could all have had some sort of motive. Well, now I've got to look into what you might call the problem of physical possibility."

Simon Templar lighted a cigarette. It was the only movement that anyone made, and after that he was the most intent listener of them all as Fanshire went on: "Dr. Rassin says, and I must say I agree with him, that to drive that umbrella shaft clean through a man's chest must have taken quite exceptional strength. It seems to be something that no woman, and probably no ordinary man, could have done."

His pale bright eyes came to rest on Herrick as he finished speaking, and the Saint found his own eyes following others in the same direction.

The picture formed in his mind: the young giant towering over a prostrate Vosper, the umbrealla raised in his mighty arms like a fantastic spear and the setting sun flaming on his red head, like an avenging angel, as he thrust downwards with all the power of those herculean shoulders... and then, as Herrick's face began to flush under the awareness of so many stares, Janet Blaise suddenly cried out: "No! No—it couldn't have been Reggie!"

Fanshire's gaze transferred itself to her curiously, and she said in a stammering rush: "You see, it's silly, but we didn't quite tell the truth, I mean about being in our

own rooms. As a matter of fact, Reggie was in my room most of the time. We were—talking."

The Superintendent cleared his throat and continued to gaze at her stolidly for a while. He didn't make any comment. But presently he looked at the Saint in the same dispassionately thoughtful way that he had first looked at Herrick.

Simon said calmly: "Yes, I was just wondering myself whether I could have done it. And I had a rather interesting thought."

"Yes, Mr. Templar?"

"Certainly it must take quite a lot of strength to drive a spike through a man's chest with one blow. But now remember that this wasn't just a spike, or a spear. It had an enormous great umbrella on top of it. Now think what would happen if you were stabbing down with a thing like that?"

"Well, what would happen?"

"The umbrella would be like a parachute. It would be like a sort of sky anchor holding the shaft back. The air resistance would be so great that I'm wondering how anyone, even a very strong man, could get much momentum into the thrust. And the more force he put into it, the more likely he'd be to lift himself off the ground, rather than drive the spike down."

Fanshire digested this, blinking, and took his full time to do it.

"That certainly is a thought," he admitted. "But damn it," he exploded, "we know it was done. So it must have been possible."

"There's something entirely backwards about that logic," said the Saint. "Suppose we say, if it was impossible, maybe it wasn't done."

"Now you're being a little ridiculous," Fanshire snapped. "We saw—"

"We saw a man with the sharp iron-tipped shaft of a beach umbrella through his chest. We jumped to the natural conclusion that somebody stuck it into him like a sword. And that may be just what a clever murderer meant us to think."

Then it was Arthur Gresson who shattered the fragile silence by leaping out of his chair like a bouncing ball.

"I've got it!" he yelped. "Believe me, everybody, I've got it! This'll kill you!"

"I hope not," Major Fanshire said drily. "But what is it?"

"Listen," Gresson said. "I knew something rang a bell somewhere, but I couldn't place it. Now it all comes back to me. This is something I only heard at the hotel the other day, but some of you must have heard it before. It happened about a year ago, when Gregory Peck was visiting here. He stayed at the same hotel where I am, and one afternoon he was on the beach, and the wind came up, just like it did today, and it picked up one of those beach umbrellas and carried it right to where he was lying, and the point just grazed his ribs and gave him a nasty

gash, but what the people who saw it happen were saying was that if he'd been just a few inches the other way, it could have gone smack into his heart, and you'd've had a film star killed in the most sensational way that ever was. Didn't you ever hear about that, Major?"

"Now that you mention it," Fanshire said slowly, "I think I did hear something about it."

"Well," Gresson said, *"what if it happened again this afternoon, to someone who wasn't as lucky as Peck?"*

There was another of those electric silences of assimilation, out of which Lucy Wexall said: "Yes, I heard about that." And Janet said: "Remember, I told you about it! I was visiting some friends at the hotel that day, and I didn't see it happen, but I was there for the commotion."

Gresson spread out his arms, his round face gleaming with excitement and perspiration.

"That's got to be it!" he said. "You remember how Vosper was lying under the umbrella outside the patio when we started playing touch football, and he got sore because we were kicking sand over him, and he went off to the other end of the beach? But he didn't take the umbrella with him. The wind did that, after we all went off to change. And this time it didn't miss!"

Suddenly Astron stood up beside him; but where Gresson had risen like a jumping bean, this was like the growth and unfolding of a tree.

"I have heard many words," Astron said, in his firm gentle voice, "but now at last I think I am hearing truth. No man struck the blasphemer down. The arrow of God smote him, in his wickedness and his pride, as it was written long ago in the stars."

"You can say that again," Gresson proclaimed triumphantly. "He sure had it coming."

Again the Saint drew at his cigarette and created his own vision behind half-closed eyes. He saw the huge umbrella plucked from the sand by the invisible fingers of the wind, picked up and hurled spinning along the deserted twilight beach, its great mushroom spread of gaudy canvas no longer a drag now but a sail for the wind to get behind the whole thing transformed into a huge unearthly dart flung with literally superhuman power—the arrow of God indeed. A fantastic, an almost unimaginable solution; and yet it did not have to be imagined because there were witnesses that it had almost happened once before . . .

Fanshire was saying: "By Jove, that's the best suggestion I've heard yet—without any religious implication, of course. It sounds as if it could be the right answer!"

Simon's eyes opened on him fully for an instant, almost pityingly, and then closed completely as the true and right and complete answer rolled through the Saint's

mind like a long peaceful wave.

"I have one question to ask," said the Saint.

"What's that?" Fanshire said, too polite to be irritable, yet with a trace of impatience, as if he hated the inconvenience of even defending such a divinely tailored theory.

"Does anyone here have a gun?" asked the Saint.

There was an almost audible creaking of knitted brows, and Fanshire said: "Really, Mr. Templar, I don't quite follow you."

"I only asked," said the Saint imperturbably, "if anyone here had a gun. I'd sort of like to know the answer before I explain why."

"I have a revolver," Wexall said with some perplexity. "What about it?"

"Could we see it, please?" said the Saint.

"I'll get it," said Pauline Stone.

She got up and left the room.

"You know I have a gun, Fanshire," Wexall said. "You gave me my permit. But I don't see—"

"Neither do I," Fanshire said.

The Saint said nothing. He devoted himself to his cigarette, with impregnable detachment, until the voluptuous secretary came back. Then he put out the cigarette and extended his hand.

Pauline looked at Wexall, hesitantly, and at Fanshire. The Superintendent nodded a sort of grudging acquiescence. Simon took the gun and broke it expertly.

"A Colt .38 Detective Special," he said. "Unloaded." He sniffed the barrel. "But fired quite recently," he said, and handed the gun to Fanshire.

"I used it myself this morning," Lucy Wexall said cheerfully. "Janet and Reg and I were shooting at the Portuguese men-of-war. There were quite a lot of them around before the breeze came up."

"I wondered what the noise was," Wexall said vaguely.

"I was coming up the drive when I heard it first," Gresson said, "and I thought the next war had started."

"This is all very int'resting," Fanshire said, removing the revolver barrel from the proximity of his nostrils with a trace of exasperation, "but I don't see what it has to do with the case. Nobody has been shot—"

"Major Fanshire," said the Saint quietly, "may I have a word with you, outside? And will you keep that gun in your pocket so that at least we can hope there will be no more shooting?"

The Superintendent stared at him for several seconds, and at last unwillingly got up.

"Very well, Mr. Templar." He stuffed the revolver into the side pocket of his rumpled white jacket, and glanced back at his impassive chocolate sentinel. "Sergeant, see that nobody leaves here, will you?"

He followed Simon out on the veranda and said almost peremp-

torily: "Come on now, what's this all about?"

It was so much like a flash of a faraway Scotland Yard Inspector that the Saint had to control a smile. But he took Fanshire's arm and led him persuasively down the front steps to the beach. Off to their left a tiny red glowworm blinked low down under the silver stars.

"You still have somebody watching the place where the body was found?" Simon asked.

"Of course," Fanshire grumbled. "As a matter of routine. But the sand's much too soft to show any footprints, and—"

"Will you walk over there with me?"

Fanshire sighed briefly, and trudged beside him. His politeness was dogged but unfailing. He was a type that had been schooled from adolescence never to give up, even to the ultimate in ennui. In the interests of total fairness he would be game to the last yawn.

He did go so far as to say: "I don't know what you're getting at, but why *couldn't* it have been an accident?"

"I never heard a better theory in my life," said the Saint equably, "with one insuperable flaw."

"What's that?"

"Only," said the Saint, very gently, "that the wind wasn't blowing the right way."

Major Fanshire kept his face straight ahead to the wind and said nothing more after that until they reached the glowworm that they were making for and it became a cigarette end that a constable dropped as he came to attention.

The place where Floyd Vosper had been lying was marked off in a square of tape, but there was nothing out of the ordinary about it except some small stains that showed almost black under the flashlight which the constable produced.

"May I mess up the scene a bit?" Simon asked.

"I don't see why not," Fanshire said doubtfully. "It doesn't show anything, really."

Simon went down on his knees and began to dig with his hands, around and under the place where the stains were. Minutes later he stood up, with sand trickling through his fingers, and showed Fanshire the mushroomed scrap of metal that he had found.

"A .38 bullet," Fanshire said, and whistled.

"And I think you'll be able to prove it was fired from the gun you have in your pocket," said the Saint. "Also you'd better have a sack of sand picked up from where I was digging. I think a laboratory examination will find that it also contains fragments of bone and human flesh."

"You'll have to explain this to me," Fanshire said quite humbly.

Simon dusted his hands and lighted a cigarette.

"Vosper was lying on his face when I last saw him," he said, "and I think he was as much

passed out as sleeping. With the wind and the surf and the soft sand it was easy for the murderer to creep up on him and shoot him in the back. But the murderer didn't want you looking for guns and comparing bullets. The umbrella was the inspiration. I don't have to remind you that the exit hole of a bullet is much larger than the entrance. By turning Vosper's body over, the murderer found a hole in his chest into which it couldn't have been too difficult to force the umbrella shaft—thus obliterating the original wound and confusing everybody in one single operation."

"Let's get back to the house," said the Superintendent abruptly.

After a while, as they walked, Fanshire said: "It's going to feel awfully funny, having to arrest Herbert Wexall."

"Good God!" said the Saint, in honest astonishment. "You weren't thinking of doing that?"

Fanshire stopped and blinked at him.

"Why not?"

"Did Herbert seem at all guilty when he admitted he had a gun? Did he seem at all uncomfortable— I don't mean just puzzled, like you were—about having it produced? Was he ready with the explanation of why it still smelled of being fired?"

"But if anyone else used Wexall's gun," Fanshire pondered laboriously, "why should they go to such lengths to make it look as if no gun was used at all, when Wexall would obviously have been suspected?"

"*Because it was somebody who didn't want Wexall to take the rap,*" said the Saint. "Because Wexall is the goose who could still lay golden eggs—"

The Superintendent pulled out a handkerchief and wiped his face.

"My God," he said, "you mean you think Lucy—"

"I think we have to go all the way back to the prime question of motive," said the Saint. "Floyd Vosper was a nasty man who made dirty cracks about everyone here. But few people become murderers because of a dirty crack. Very few people kill other people on points of principle. Vosper called us all variously dupes, phonies, cheaters, and fools. But since he had roughly the same description for all of us, we could all laugh it off. There was only one person about whom he made the unforgivable accusation ... Now shall we rejoin the mob?"

"You'd better do this your own way," Fanshire muttered.

Simon Templar took him up the steps to the veranda and back through the French doors into the living room, where all eyes turned to them in deathly silence.

"A paraffin test will prove who fired that revolver in the last twenty-four hours, aside from those who have already admitted it," Simon said, as if there had been no interruption. "And you'll remember, I'm sure, who supplied that

very handy theory about the arrow of God."

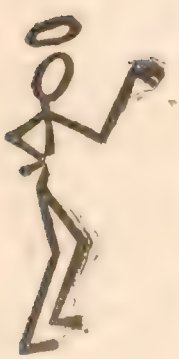
"Astron!" Fanshire gasped.

"Oh, no," said the Saint, a little tiredly. "He only said that God sometimes places his arrow in the hands of a man. And I feel quite sure that a wire to New York will establish that there is actually a criminal file under the name of Granville, with fingerprints and photos that should match Mr. Gresson's—as Vosper's fatally elephantine memory remembered.... That was the one crack he shouldn't have made—mentioning Granville as Gresson's middle name—because it was the only one that was more than gossip or shrewd insult, the only one that could be easily proved, and the only one that had a chance of upsetting an operation which was all set—if you'll excuse the phrase—to make a big killing."

Major Fanshire fingered his upper lip.

"I don't know," he began; and then, as Arthur Granville Gresson began to rise like a floating balloon from his chair, and the ebony-faced sergeant moved to intercept him like a well-disciplined automaton, he knew.

NEXT MONTH —



CASE OF THE FRAGILE FLOWER
by RUFUS KING

JEALOUSY
by WILLIAM FAULKNER

CASE CLOSED
by HAL ELLSON

ARTUR'S STORY
by MIRIAM ALLEN DeFORD

KOLD KOMFORT
by VERONICA PARKER JOHNS

THE MAN FROM ST. LOUIS
by LESLIE CHARTERIS

and

BREATHE DEEP, LADY!
A NEW STORY by LAWRENCE TREAT

— in the February issue of THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE

the spectre of russian hill

by Lawrence G. Blochman

DETECTIVE-SERGEANT Pete Potrero drew back the curtains and snapped on the glaring floodlights that illuminated the refrigerated showcase in which the unidentified dead were propped up like gruesome dummies. He pointed.

"It must be Bill." Ralph Clayborn nodded solemnly then quickly turned his head away. The corpse was hideously disfigured.

Sergeant Potrero switched off the lights, threw away a match he had been chewing, and gently nudged Clayborn toward the exit from the morgue. He said: "Would you make that identification positive, Mr. Clayborn?"

Ralph Clayborn paused on the outside steps and breathed deeply, as though happy to be back in the realm of the living.

"It's hard to be definite, the way his face is burned," he said. "Still he's the right build. He must be about the same height as Bill, too. About five feet three?"

"Exactly five feet three," said the detective.

"Then, since it was Bill's car, his lodge emblems and everything, it *must* be Bill."

"Maybe his wife could make a positive identification."

"Good lord, no! Don't bring Juliette down here. She's having hysterics as it is. This would fin-

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As we have said so many times, Lawrence G. Blochman has lived and worked in the cities and in the countries about which he writes. Including San Francisco—where we meet Detective Sergeant Potrero, a big broad-shouldered Yaqui Indian with the dark eyes of the born cop ....

---

ish her. Besides, I've known Bill longer than she has."

"Then I'd better get a dental identification," said Sergeant Potrero. "Do you happen to know the name of your brother's dentist here in San Francisco, Mr. Clayborn?"

"Yes, of course. Dr. Matthew Hines. I don't remember his address off-hand, but he's in the phone book. And now if you don't mind...."

"One more question, Mr. Clayborn. Did your brother have any enemies that you know of?"

"Bill? Not an enemy in the world. I think you can forget the foul-play angle, Sergeant. It looks like a pure accident."

"That's what the coroner thinks," Potrero said. "I doubt if he'll even hold an inquest. Unless the D.A. or some of the family insists."

"The family is certainly not going to insist," Clayborn said. "We want to get this whole tragic business over with as quickly as possible. As soon as we can get a burial permit, we'll hold a simple service and bury poor Bill."

"Okay, Mr. Clayborn. If I can get hold of that dentist, we should release the body this afternoon."

"Thank you, Sergeant." Clayborn paused at the curb, fumbling for his car keys. He was a big, plump, red-faced, red-haired man of about forty. He had bulging eyes and a thin-lipped, rather weak mouth that somehow conveyed an impression of strength—or at least ruthlessness. He got into the car, twisted the starter key, and roared off.

Ralph Clayborn headed for the great house on one of San Francisco's many hills where he had been living with his brother and sister-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. William Clayborn, the William Clayborn whose convertible had plunged off a sharp turn on the Twin Peaks road some time during the night. It was in the smoking wreckage of the car, at the bottom of a long drop, that they had found the charred body.

Ralph Clayborn did not exactly relish the thought of again facing the hysterical grief of Bill's wife Juliette, who had been weeping and wailing all day. For a moment he considered putting a stop to her inconsolable tears, but immediately thought better of it. His car zoomed up the steep slope of aristocratic Nob Hill, purred along the crest, dipped and climbed again to Russian Hill where he turned north. He braked as the car rolled down the precipitous cobbled street toward the blue waters of the bay and the green hills of Marin County beyond. As he turned into the driveway of an imposing mansion, he noted that the afternoon fog was drifting in earlier than usual, blurring the gaudy orange outlines of Golden Gate Bridge.

Ralph Clayborn stopped his car under the porte-cochere that protected the side entrance, and handed the keys to the butler who

opened the door immediately.

"There's a man to see you in the front room, Mr. Clayborn," the butler said.

"What's he want, Billings?"

"He wouldn't say, sir—except that it was important and that he would wait."

Clayborn scowled as he dropped his hat on the table in the entryway. He hesitated an instant before parting the drapes of wine-colored velvet.

"Sorry to intrude under these painful circumstances," said the visitor, rising, "but I'm afraid it's unavoidable."

Clayborn did not reply. He studied the stranger carefully—a well-dressed young man of perhaps thirty-five, with keen eyes and a hardness that somehow penetrated his slick external polish. He handed Clayborn his card.

"I'm George Summers," he said, "of Seven Seas Casualty and Life Insurance Co. As you probably know, your brother carried a policy with us."

Clayborn's manner changed immediately. The scowl faded from his ruddy features. He shook Summers's hand almost cordially.

"Please sit down," he said, calling the butler. "Billings, the sherry. Or would you rather have port, Mr. Summers? Or whisky?"

"Nothing for me, thanks," said Summers. "But don't let me stop your usual."

"Not before sundown." Clayborn settled himself in a chair. "So you've come about Bill's insurance? I've always heard that Seven Seas was noted for prompt payment of claims, but I scarcely expected to see a check so soon. I suppose you read the newspaper accounts of my brother's death?"

Summers nodded. "I read about Mr. William Clayborn's unfortunate accident," he said. "But I'm afraid I'm not bringing you a check. In fact, the claim will not even be considered until I finish my report. I'm not an adjuster, you see."

"I see." Ralph Clayborn's eyebrows arched slightly. He glanced at Summers's card for the first time—and noticed the title "Special Investigator" under the name. There was a silence of several seconds, during which Billings entered with glasses and bottles. "Under the circumstances," Clayborn continued, "perhaps—a drop?"

"A drop," said the insurance investigator.

"You mean—?" Clayborn cleared his throat, sipped his sherry. "You mean that my brother's premiums were not paid up?"

"I wouldn't know," said Summers. "As far as I know, his premiums were in order. My investigation is just routine. Whenever there is a policy as large as your brother's involved—well. . . ."

"Naturally." Clayborn raised his glass. "To your good health."

"Your brother was insured for $100,000," said Summers. "His policy called for double indemnity in case of accidental death. You

must understand why my company insists on caution."

Clayborn bristled. "Is there any doubt that my brother died in an accident?"

Summers fitted a fresh cigarette into a stained ivory holder. "I must consider two possibilities," he said, after striking a match. "First, your brother may have been dead before his car plunged over the embankment. If he had died of heart failure at the wheel—a logical explanation of the accident—my company would have been obligated to pay the $100,000 face value of the policy, but not the double indemnity."

"And second?" Clayborn's voice was not friendly.

"Second." Summers exhaled an attenuated cloud of smoke before he continued. "Second, your brother may have deliberately driven his car over the bank—in which case his policy would have been void. The policy excluded suicide within the first six months. The policy had been in effect exactly five months and twenty-eight days."

"Both your hypotheses are nonsense." Clayborn poured himself another glass of sherry. "There was nothing wrong with Bill's heart. And he had certainly no reason to commit suicide."

"No business worries?" asked Summers over his wine glass. He took a second sip.

"None whatever."

"Wasn't he in business with you, Mr. Clayborn?"

"We were partners, yes."

"Clayborn Brothers, importers of French and Oriental silks?"

"Yes."

"Hasn't the silk market been a little on the shaky side, in these years since the rise of synthetic fibers? And the loss of cheap Chinese sources?"

"All markets have been affected by what the economists call 'the recession' or the 'readjustment of inventories,' depending on which analyst you read," said Clayborn. "But I can assure you that the Clayborn Brothers have been consistently sound."

"I have no reason to doubt your word," said Summers. "But there is one question. Your brother's policy names you as sole beneficiary. Didn't he make any provision for Mrs. Clayborn?"

"My brother's wife was well taken care of." Clayborn poured himself another sherry. "With other insurance companies. His policy with Seven Seas was protection for our partnership. My brother was a valuable silk man. . . ."

"Of course. I wonder if I might speak to Mrs. Clayborn? I understand you and your brother and his wife have been occupying the same house. . . ."

"She's upstairs, but I doubt if she would be much help. She's been hysterical all day, in addition to which she doesn't speak very good English. My brother married her on a recent business trip to Lyons. . . ."

The insurance investigator nod-

ded sympathetically. He took his hat. "Sorry to have bothered you," he said. "I'm sure everything will be straightened out within a few days."

He did not shake hands with Clayborn as he left.

When Detective-sergeant Pete Potrero came to work next morning, still chewing thoughtfully on his breakfast toothpick, he found the card of Mr. George Summers, Special Investigator for the Seven Seas Casualty and Life Insurance Co., lying on his desk. The sergeant belched softly, then drew himself up to his full six feet, and belched more loudly. Potrero was a big, broad-shouldered Yaqui Indian with the inquisitive dark eyes of the born cop, the swarthy skin and prominent cheek-bones of the California aboriginee and the prominent paunch of the Spanish-Indian mixtures which over the centuries had developed a great taste for the native corn, the chile pepper, the pinto bean, and such derivatives as the tortilla, the enchilada, and the taco.

Detective-sergeant Peter Potrero opened his mouth for a third eructation but the inner pressure had dropped below belching point. "Send this bird in," he said to the plain-clothes man who had brought in the card.

Potrero shifted his toothpick to the other side of his mouth as he assayed the insurance investigator: A little too well dressed, he decided. Too much time wasted on getting his necktie knotted in the right place, the right size, and the right color. Still, the guy didn't look too dumb at first glance....

"It's about the William Clayborn accident, Sergeant," said Summers. I understand you've been working on the case."

"The case is closed," Potrero said. "Accident. The family buried the guy last night. Private."

"You are sure of the identity?"

"The family's sure. Do you think they'd bury a stranger in their family plot? Anyhow, I'm satisfied. Clayborn's dentist checked on some fillings he's put in."

"Gold inlays?"

"Amalgam fillings." Sergeant Potrero removed his toothpick, broke it in two, and flicked it toward the gleaming cuspidor across the room. He picked up some papers from his desk. "You'll have to excuse me," he said. "Some of us have got to work for a living."

"Just a minute, Sergeant. I'd like to talk to you—"

"There's nothing to talk about."

"Oh yes there is. I'm going to ask for an exhumation of Clayborn's body."

"What for?"

"I'm going to ask for an autopsy. William Clayborn took out a $100,000 double-indemnity policy with my company less than six months ago."

Potrero grunted. "Murder, you think? Not suicide, sure as hell."

"I don't know. But I want an autopsy."

"Why would the Clayborns try

to rook a poor struggling insurance company with only ninety million bucks in reserve? They got dough. Did you ever see that miserable little hovel on Russian Hill they live in?"

"It's plastered with mortgages, and the interest is nearly two years in arrears. Banks do foreclose, you know."

"But Clayborn Brothers is an old and rich firm—"

"Was," said Summers. "They've been skimming the thin ice of bankruptcy for nearly a year."

"Even so," said Potrero. "That's a hell of a clumsy way to kill a man, drive a car off a cliff, take a chance on the gas tank exploding. Unless—"

"Exactly," said Summers. "Unless. Because of course the gas tank didn't explode. I was looking at the wreckage. If the tank had exploded, the jagged edges of the hole would have been forced out. Actually, they were forced in."

"Maybe when the car rolled down the bank. Maybe a sharp rock or a fence post or something—"

"Nothing," said Summers. "I went over the ground very carefully. I'm convinced that the gas tank was deliberately smashed in and the car set afire."

"Sit down," said the detective-sergeant. "And what would Mr. William Clayborn be doing all this time? Just sitting there, waiting to be grilled to a crisp like a triple lamb chop with kidneys?"

"The man in the car," said Summers, "was probably dead when the car was set afire. That's why I think an autopsy is imperative."

The detective took a wooden match from his pocket, clamped his teeth upon it, and stared at Summers with undisguised hostility. "Mr. Seven Seas," he said, "I get the distinct impression that what you're trying to do is make me look like a five-star moron in spades—and with bells on. I guess you won't be surprised if I don't co-operate with much enthusiasm."

"You're entirely wrong," Summers said. "This is your case and I want you to get all the credit for whatever solution we arrive at jointly. My sole interest is in saving my company $100,000—or perhaps $200,000. Will you back me on my request for exhumation and autopsy?"

Sergeant Potrero took the match from between his teeth, broke it in half, and flicked it toward the cuspidor. "I might at that," he said.

"Then you'll hear from me," said the insurance investigator. "After I've done a few errands. Meanwhile, could you give me the name and address of that dentist you speak of?"

Potrero could and did. Summers wrote the information in a little notebook, shook hands with the sergeant, and took his departure. Just outside the squad room he paused to replace the notebook in his pocket.

"Amalgam fillings," he said to himself, as he narrowed his eyes

in the manner of a blonde wife who has just discovered a long dark hair on the shoulder of her husband's coat.

Fog crawled silently over the hills of San Francisco like a spectral legion. Winds sweeping through the Golden Gate sent the mist scurrying up the steep streets, dancing over the glistening cobbles in macabre eddies. The street light in front of the Clayborn house made a greenish halo in the blurred darkness.

Inside the house Ralph Clayborn paced the floor of his study. Although his hands were clasped behind his back, his shoulders were slightly stooped. A Scotch and soda was going flat on the coffee table, but he did not touch it even as he stopped to listen. Above the rattle of windows in the fog-laden wind, he could hear the faint, grief-choked treble of a woman sobbing in the night. This broken-hearted lament had been going on almost without interruption for thirty-six hours, ever since the news had come that Bill Clayborn's car had plunged over the embankment. Juliette Clayborn was mourning her husband.

Ralph Clayborn's thin lips tightened slightly as he resumed pacing. He was expecting a visitor, yet he jumped like a startled rabbit when the door bell rang.

The butler announced Dr. Matthew Hines. Before Clayborn could say "Show him in, Billings," the dentist was in the room.

Dr. Hines walked with quick but not jerky steps. His hair was dead white, although his face was young and unwrinkled and his arched eyebrows were jet black. The startling curve and blackness of his eyebrows, together with the sharpness of his prominent nose, gave him a Mephistophelean appearance—that of a suave, ingratiating Mephistopheles. He settled himself in a comfortable chair and smiled.

Ralph Clayborn did not smile back. "I got your message," he said. "What do you want?"

Dr. Hines crossed his legs and verified the knife creases in his trousers. Suddenly he said:

"Money."

"You'll have to wait." Clayborn made a gesture of impatience. "The insurance claim hasn't been paid yet."

"Why should I wait? I carried out my end of the bargain."

"Nevertheless, you'll have to wait."

"See here, Clayborn." The dentist stood up. "If you have any idea of welshing on me, I'll make you wish you hadn't."

"It's a little late for you to be talking like that, isn't it, Doctor?" Clayborn sneered.

"Not at all. In fact, I—" He was interrupted by the ringing of the door bell. It was a long, determined ring. There was a silence of a dozen seconds, during which the sobbing of Juliette Clayborn upstairs seemed louder. The butler entered stiffly.

"It's that Mr Summers, sir," he said. "The insurance gentleman."

"Tell him I'm out," Clayborn said. "Don't let him in."

"I'm afraid he's already in, sir," the butler said.

Both Ralph Clayborn and Dr. Hines were facing the door when Summers came in. Clayborn began a gesture to introduce the dentist when Summers said:

"Good evening, Doctor." Turning to Clayborn, he explained: "I called on Dr. Hines this afternoon. I had a few questions."

"You've been asking a good many questions these last few days," said Clayborn sourly. "Haven't you any answers?"

"Indeed I have," said Summers.

There was another pause. Ralph Clayborn glared at the insurance investigator. Dr. Hines passed thin, tapering fingers over his gleaming white hair. Summers looked from one to the other with confident, almost challenging eyes. He had opened his mouth to speak, when he was startled into silence.

From the floor above came a wild, unearthly shriek. It was a prolonged piercing scream of a terror-stricken woman, growing hoarse with fright as it was desperately repeated. The screams grew louder, accompanied now by panic-quickened steps in the stairway.

As the three men turned toward the curtained entrance, a young woman staggered into the room, still screaming. When she saw Clayborn, she stopped screaming, tried to say something, then stumbled to her knees. Clayborn picked her up and carried her to a divan. Despite the fact that her eyes were red with weeping and her face pale with terror, she was strikingly lovely. Her soft chestnut hair was in charming disarray as she lay on the divan, trying to compose herself. When she opened her eyes and saw the three men standing over her, she pulled her pale-blue negligee closer around her throat. She was gasping for breath.

"What is it, Juliette?" Clayborn asked. "What happened?"

She stared at him wide-eyed for a long moment before she breathed:

"He . . . he came back. I saw him." She pronounced it: Ah-ee so heem.

"Who came back, Juliette?" Clayborn demanded. "Who did you see?"

"Bill! My dead husband came back."

"Now, Juliette. You mustn't let this thing get the best of you. You mustn't talk nonsense, Juliette."

"No, no!" she protested. "It is not nonsense. He was there. I recognized him. He was in my room."

Ralph Clayborn turned to Summers who was hanging on Juliette's every syllable.

"Nerves," explained Clayborn. "She's been hysterical ever since we broke the news to her. In her

overwrought condition, I'm not suprised that she's beginning to see apparitions."

"No, no!" Juliette repeated. "I was not seeing things. My Bill spoke to me. I heard him. He spoke French to me."

Ralph Clayborn smiled tolerantly. "Now, now, Juliette," he said.

"He spoke French to me," the girl said again. "I recognized his funny little American accent. He said I was not to worry. He said we would be together again soon." She wailed. "Does that mean I am going to die?"

"Let's go up and look for the ghost," Summers suggested. "He may still be around."

"Let's not," said Clayborn under his breath. "She's liable to go completely off her rocker."

Juliette Clayborn sat up suddenly. With deft fingers, she patted her hair into place. "Please come," she said. "I promise not to scream again. I don't know why I screamed before. I should have been glad to see my Bill, but it was so unexpected, I was only frightened. Please come."

"Now, Juliette," Clayborn frowned.

"Please." Juliette got to her feet.

"Sure, let's go," said Summers.

Now strangely calm, Juliette led the three men up the stairs, and into her bedroom. There was no one there, of course.

"He was standing right there," said Juliette, pointing to some French windows.

Following the direction of her finger, Summers found the glass doors slightly ajar. He pushed them open and stepped out on to a little cement balcony surrounded by a ballustrade. The balcony reached out toward the garage, which stood close to the mansion, but it did not connect with any adjoining rooms. Summers noted, however, that a man standing on the balustrade could climb to the roof of the house without too much difficulty. He came back into Juliette's room.

"No ghosts?" Ralph Clayborn smiled sarcastically.

"If she really did see a man," said Summers, half to himself, "she would naturally endow him with the traits of her—her late husband. Whom do you suppose she might have seen?"

"The only man in the house besides the three of us is the butler," Clayborn said, "and he never comes upstairs."

"It might have been a prowler then," the insurance investigator said. "We'd better have a look at the other rooms."

Before Clayborn could even say "Nonsense," Summers was off on a tour of inspection, efficiently and brazenly opening doors, exploring the attic, and even climbing to the roof. He found nothing.

The three men left a calmer Juliette who promised to go to bed like a good girl; they returned to the study.

"Maybe you can tell me now,"

asked Ralph Clayborn, "why all this hocus-pocus is necessary before you can pay a simple claim?"

"Sure, I can tell you." Summers paused as he spotted a bronze humidor on the coffee table, investigated it, chose a perfecto, and took his time about lighting it. "I can tell you this," he went on, after blowing a smoke ring. "I've got a right to be suspicious. I found out today that Mr. William Clayborn was not killed in the wreck of his car."

Ralph Clayborn uttered a short, humorless laugh. "Bound to save that double indemnity for your company, eh?" he said. "Still think you can prove my brother Bill died a natural death before his car went off the road?"

"On the contrary." Summers waved his cigar at Clayborn and the dentist. "The body was exhumed today for the autopsy which should have been performed before burial. I got the pathologist's report just before I came here tonight. He found no soot in the lungs—so the man did not burn to death."

He paused, waiting for a reaction.

Dr. Hines stirred uneasily in his chair. "What did the pathologist find?" he asked at last.

"A .32 caliber bullet in the brain."

"Well, well, well!" said Ralph Clayborn sarcastically. "So you're not only trying to save your company one hundred thousand—you're trying to save the whole two hundred thousand by building up proof that my brother Bill committed suicide?"

"Not at all." Summers spoke slowly, watching the two men closely to watch the effect of his words. "In fact, I'm practically certain that William Clayborn did not kill himself. There was no gun found in the wreckage or anywhere near it. Furthermore, it would have been physcially impossible for the dead man to have fired that bullet into his own brain. The shot entered the skull from the back of the head."

"Incredible!" Ralph Clayborn's face turned the color of wet chalk. "Are you trying to tell me that my poor brother was murdered?"

"That might be a reasonable conclusion at this point," said the insurance investigator. "Did your brother ever own a .32 caliber revolver?"

"Not that I know of. Bill had no reason to go about armed."

"Did you, Mr. Clayborn?"

"Definitely not."

"Was there a pistol of this caliber anywhere in the house—and which has disappeared recently?"

"Never!" Clayborn got up and rang for the butler. "Summers, if this is the start of another of your interminable cross-examinations, I think we might have a drink, don't you?"

"I have just a few more questions, Mr. Clayborn . . . ."

"Billings, ice please, soda, water, and whisky. Does anybody prefer brandy? Bring brandy, too,

Billings."

"Mr. Clayborn, did your brother break his arm at any time during the past fifteen or twenty years?"

"Possibly," Ralph Clayborn said. "I don't recall at the moment. But then my brother and I have not been together constantly for the past twenty years. The war—"

"Then your brother was in service during World War II?"

"Oh yes. He was in G-2."

"Intelligence. Would that bring him into the combat zone?"

"Quite probably. He was an interpreter, I believe. Prisoner interrogation."

"Was he wounded?"

"Mr. Summers, you never knew my brother. He was the most modest, the most unassuming man who ever lived. He never wore any of the ribbons he won overseas. I think the Purple Heart was among them, but I couldn't swear to it, because he would never wear it."

"I ask that question," Summers said, "because the autopsy today revealed a right arm that had been pretty badly shattered after the man had attained full growth. It could have been shrapnel or a personnel mine—it was that fragmented—and it had been patched up with a silver plate. Looked to me like an army job. Now, when Mr. William Clayborn underwent physical examination for his Seven Seas policy, there was no mention of this fact."

Ralph Clayborn chuckled. "It has been my experience," he said, "that most of the broken-down old M.D.'s that you insurance people hire as examiners—at a reduced fee, naturally—will pass any applicant who can pass water without obvious difficulty—provided the specimen is free of sugar, albumen, casts and cylindroids—and the applicant doesn't pass out in the process. I don't think he would be much concerned with silver plates in the arm."

"You may be right, Mr. Clayborn." The insurance investigator turned to Dr. Hines. "This afternoon, Doctor, you said you would dig up some X-ray films you once made of Mr. William Clayborn's teeth. Any luck?"

"As a matter of fact, it slipped my mind completely," said Dr. Hines. "From the moment you left, I've had one patient after another. Several difficult extractions ...."

"This is rather important, Doctor," Summers said. "Could I drop by your office tonight? I'd like very much to know if the films still exist."

"Certainly, certainly." Dr. Hines was almost eager. "Could I drive you over now?"

Summers hesitated a fraction of a second. He glanced at his watch.

"I have my own car outside," he said, "and I've one small errand to do first. Could I drop in, say, in half an hour?"

"Any time, Mr. Summers, at your convenience."

"Thank you." The insurance in-

vestigator relit his host's perfecto, waved the match cordially at the two men who seemed still to regard him with some hostility, and blew it out "See you later then, Doctor," he said, as he made a jaunty exit.

The moment the door had closed behind him, however, the atmosphere of Ralph Clayborn's study underwent nuclear fission. The urbane, white-haired dentist became in a trice a snarling, snapping beast with fangs bared. His polish became power, his suavity turned to ferocity. He hovered over Ralph Clayborn, fingers become claws, as though ready to pounce on the man whose cruel, cowardly, thin lips had suddenly begun to quiver in desperate defense.

"Magnificent!" exclaimed Dr. Hines after a long pause. "Superb! The most stupid bit of stupid bungling I've ever seen. If you and I end up on the north shore of the bay, squatting over nests of cyanide eggs, you can leave yourself a post-mortem letter of thanks. You might just as well have wired the details to the district attorney."

"What did I do wrong?" Clayborn demanded sullenly.

Dr. Hines cackled. "What the hell did you do right? First of all, those amalgam fillings. I warned you that even perjury couldn't quite cover them up."

"What could I do? I told you that all the gold inlays were either too tall or too fat. I couldn't go on forever, could I?"

"You had six months. That should have been plenty. And then that incredibly idiotic ghost-walking routine tonight."

"Now listen. I had nothing to do—."

"Oh didn't you? You and your goddam Edgar Allan Poe theories. Nobody will think of looking in the most obvious place! Purloined letter, my eye. They didn't have to look. He practically walked into their arms, like in that other Poe story. What was it called? 'Thou Art the Man?' What the hell did you do with that hypodermic I gave you? Stick it up your asinine sister-in-law's tear ducts?"

"Now look," Clayborn said. "I told you I've been keeping him hopped up. I can't understand what happened tonight. Maybe Juliette really did imagine she saw him. Maybe—."

"Maybe!" mocked the dentist. "Maybe you'd like to look out the window to see if the place isn't already surrounded by ninety-nine squad cars. If not, you'd better get him out of here right away. On second thought, don't. You'd screw that up too. Wait till I come back. I'm going over to meet that smart insurance dick now. When I get back, we'll all blow. And probably up."

"What are you going to do?"

"I don't know. I'll have to play it by ear. One thing I'm sure of. He's not going to look through the family X-ray album."

Dr. Hines thrust his hands into

his coat pockets and strode from the room without another glance at Clayborn. The door slammed behind him with an ominous sound. A moment later Clayborn heard the whine of his starter and cough of his engine spitting at the foggy night.

When George Summers left the Clayborn mansion, he, too, underwent a change. The cigar he had been smoking at such a cocky angle he flung away furiously into the night. He jumped into his car as if he were attacking a hostile hornets' nest, released the brakes, and let the car roll down hill without starting the engine. He pulled up in front of a drugstore, dove for a phone booth, and called police headquarters.

"Hello, Sergeant Potrero...? This is Summers... Sure, plenty. William Clayborn is not only alive, but he's hiding out somewhere around the house on Russian Hill. He showed up tonight and damned near scared his wife to death. Apparently she isn't in on the deal.... No, not yet, but I will.... Listen, Sergeant, here's why I called you. Doc Hines is our man. I've been watching him like you watch the form charts at Bay Meadows, and he's dangerous.... Sure, ten times more so than Ralph Clayborn, because he's smart. Believe me, Clayborn didn't discover relativity.... Listen, Sergeant, I'm supposed to meet Hines in his office in half an hour. You don't have so far to go, and maybe you could beat him to the punch and go through his stuff before he gets there.... You haven't eaten? Hell, Sergeant, you can live off your hump for an hour or so.... Okay, get a sandwich, only don't put your eye out with the toothpick.... No, no. No pinch yet. Let's give them some more rope. See you pronto. Hasta luego."

Coming out of the drug store, Summers got back into his car, made a U-turn, and started back up the hill toward the Clayborn mansion. Suddenly he saw two fingers of light groping through the fog, the twin beams of car headlights coming out of the Clayborn driveway and swinging up hill. Summers stepped on the accelerator. His car whined in second as the tires caught traction on the wet cobbles.

By the time Summers had reached the crest of the hill, the car that came out of the Clayborn driveway was only a red taillight in the fog, two blocks to the south. Summers depressed the accelerator and watched the red light grow larger, then swing off to the left. He followed it around two turns and chased it through little Italy into Chinatown, scarcely fifty yards behind. He could see the outlines of the car plainly now, gleaming in the orange light of the oriental lanterns burning beneath the turned-up eaves of the Chinese shops. He relinquished his speed as the first car rolled toward the vehicular tunnel under

the Stockton Street hill; he would keep his distance. He listened almost objectively to the hollow echoes of combined noises resounding from the arched roof of the tunnel—the growl of motors, the hum of tires, the yelp of klaxons....

Near the far end of the tunnel the car ahead suddenly roared into action, leapt into the open, cut sharply across traffic and disappeared into a side street.

Summers tried to follow, but as he was about to make a left turn, his way was blocked by two speeding sports cars. He swerved to avoid a collision, swerved again to dodge a fire hydrant, and slammed on his squealing brakes to keep from running into a policeman. The cop stood an indignant moment with his hands on his hips, then strode over to Summers' car, blood in his eye.

"Whadya been drinkin'?" he demanded.

Summers produced his credentials and added a word of explanation. Still looking daggers, the cop backed away and waved him on. But the chase was over. Summers had lost.

Swearing to himself, Summers drove past the office of Dr. Hines and parked around the corner. The car across the street looked very much like the one he had chased through the fog. The lights were on in Dr. Hines' third-floor office. There was no sign of Sergeant Potrero, although Summers half expected to find him waiting downstairs, mission accomplished. He looked in doorways, in parked cars, in the lunch counter across the street. No soap. Maybe the burly Indian detective had dug up red-hot evidence against the dentist and had waited to nab him.... Summers would go upstairs and see.

The night elevator operator remembered riding a man answering Potrero's description up to the third floor, but he hadn't brought him down again. No, there was only one elevator running. Of course, there were the stairs....

Immediately opposite the elevator on the third floor was a half-glass door bearing the legend: "Matthew Hines, D.D.S. Enter." Summers entered. As he pushed the door open, a bell rang somewhere. He looked about the reception room at the standard uncomfortable settee, the table piled with old magazines, the bad reproduction of a Van Gogh on the wall. He saw a door marked "Private." He opened it.

He found himself face to face with Dr. Hines, who was wiping his hands on a towel.

"I heard you come in," said the white-haired dentist with grave politeness, obviously intended as a rebuke for Summers' violation of the "private" sign. "I was just coming out to get you."

"I thought I'd save you the trouble," said Summers, staring at the stain on the dentist's towel. Hines quickly crumpled the towel

and dropped it into a receptacle.

"You're quite right," said the dentist with a quiet, patronizing laugh. "It's blood all right, but don't be alarmed. I had a rather difficult extraction late this afternoon, and my nurse neglected to change the towels. Good girls aren't easy to find these days."

"So I hear," Summers said, wondering what had happened to Detective-sergeant Potrero. He was distinctly uneasy, as his eyes took in the details of the room—the usual adjustable black-leather chair of torture, with its instrument tray swinging on brackets, the glass fountain and the cable of the drill hanging above like a snake waiting to strike. The glass and chrome of the sterilizing cabinet gleamed with cold efficiency.

"Shall we go into the reception room?" the dentist suggested. "You'll be more comfortable there."

The smooth, almost wheedling voice of Dr. Hines did nothing to dispel the sense of forboding that gripped Summers. He leaned against the dental chair and stared at the receptacle into which the bloody towel had disappeared.

"I'm fine here," he said. "Anyhow, I guess it's more convenient to your X-ray files."

"Oh yes, those X-rays. I would have phoned you if I'd known where to reach you after you left the Clayborn's, to save you the trip. It seems my girl destroyed all the negatives of Mr. William Clayborn's mouth when she read about his death. As I was saying, to get a competent girl these days. . . ."

"Yes, you were saying," murmured Summers, stooping suddenly to pick up a sliver of wood, bent L-shaped. The toothpick was chewed to a frazzle at one end and broken in the middle. An engraved calling card could not have announced more positively the presence of Detective-sergeant Pete Potrero.

Summers straightened up, aware that Dr. Hines had been watching him intently. He pointed.

"What's behind that door?"

"My lab. I do the casts for gold inlays in there."

"I've often wondered how inlays were made," Summers said. "Show me."

"They're not actually made here. I just make the casts. The gold is poured by a fellow downtown."

"Show me the casts, then," Summers insisted.

Dr. Hines made a helpless gesture. "I'm afraid my girl has gone off with the keys. A good girl these days—."

"Open that door!" It was a command, backed by a short finger of blued steel in Summers' right fist. Dr. Hines stared at the gun and tried to smile.

"You're joking, Mr. Summers."

"Open that door!" Summers ordered again.

Hines sprang aside with the agility of a cat, simultaneously jerking the door open. The flying edge of the door smashed against

Summers' hand, sweeping his pistol across the room to crash into a case of glassware. The door caught him full in the face, and he fell back a step, off balance for a second. In that second the dentist was upon him.

Summers had only a fleeting glimpse of the interior of the little lab. He could make out no details in the gloom before Hines was at his throat, and the two went down together.

Hines was a white-haired maniac. Leaping astride Summers, he sank his claw-like fingers into the insurance investigator's throat. Summers fought to break the grip, but the surprising strength of the wiry dentist was too much for him.

He writhed, twisted, bucked and kicked. With a desperate effort, he fought his way to his knees, then staggered to his feet. Hines still clung to him, his fingers locked about his windpipe. Summers gasped for air. His breath came in agonized gurgles. His eyes bulged.

Suddenly he whirled and backed hard against the dental chair, drew away, backed again, battering his adversary against the metal framework. The chair swung on its pivot. Instruments, vials, and a metal tube slid off the bracket table and clattered to the floor.

Again Summers bucked, flexing and straightening his knees, pitching forward. At last he felt the claw-like fingers relax, saw Hines go sailing grotesquely over his head to plop to the floor among the scattered bottles and instruments. Instantly he pounced upon the sprawling dentist.

Just as he pinioned Hines' shoulders, he saw the dentist's hand seize a small cylindrical object on the floor. He grabbed for the hand, but not quickly enough. The cylinder flashed before his face.

There was a faint hiss. A tiny gray cloud blossomed from the cylinder. An icy, stinging sensation stabbed Summers' eyes.

The tube contained ethyl chloride, a freezing anesthetic.

Instinctively Summers threw up one arm to shield his face, tried to grab the hissing cylinder with the other hand.

Dr. Hines slithered out from under the blinded investigator. Summers heard his retreating footsteps, rose to his feet, tried to follow. He heard a door slam. Then he smacked into a wall.

His eyes burned excruciatingly. His forehead and cheeks were frozen numb. He swore loudly and volubly as he groped along the wall, calling upon the Almighty to visit dire calamity upon the person of Dr. Matthew Hines. Suddenly he stopped to listen. He thought he had heard a man's voice. He tried to open his eyes, but searing pain kept the lids sealed. He spoke at random.

"What was that?" he asked of the silence.

"I said, 'You can say that again, brother,' " came the answer.

Summers could not see the fig-

ure stirring to life on the laboratory floor—a tall broad-shouldered man with his high cheek bones smeared with blood still oozing from an ugly gash across his forehead.

"Good lord, Summers!" said Detective-sergeant Pete Potrero when he caught sight of the insurance investigator. "What happened?"

"Potrero!" exclaimed Summers. "I knew you were behind that locked door, but I was afraid you wouldn't be able to come out under your own power."

"It takes more than a crooked dentist to bust the thick Yaqui skull of a Potrero," said the detective, touching his wound gingerly with a long forefinger. "He laid me cold with a crack on the nog, but—. Hey, what are you bawling about?"

"Bawling, hell!" Summers said. "This is involuntary lachrymation, dammit! Hines squirted some freezing stuff in my eyes. I can't see you, sergeant. Are you badly hurt?"

"I can still navigate," Potrero said.

"Then navigate after Hines—pronto! He's probably gone back to the Clayborn place."

"I better get a doctor first," Potrero said. "Your eyes—."

"Navigate!" Summers ordered. "You're a cop, right? Then move. Hines must be ready to make a break, or he wouldn't have turned on the rough stuff. Hurry, or you'll lose the living dead man."

"Say, what about the dead dead man?"

"I think I know who he is. I'll explain later. Get going."

"I'll send up a doctor on the way," Potrero said.

When the big detective had gone, Summers groped his way along the wall until he came to the cabinet containing broken bottles and beakers. Cautiously he explored the sharp edges of glass until his fingers touched cold steel. He retrieved his gun, pocketed it. Then he wandered with one arm outstretched until he bumped against the dental chair. He sat down wearily, holding a handkerchief against his eyes. With one hand he fumbled for a cigarette and snapped flame from his lighter.

When Dr. Matthew Hines had left the Clayborn house on Russian Hill, Ralph Clayborn stood at the window and watched him drive away. Seconds later he saw a second car crawl up the hill, the motor grinding in second gear. His fingers tapped the window pane silently, pensively. After a moment, he turned away, poured himself a drink, gulped it. Snapping out the lights, he paced nervously in the dark for a few moments, then impulsively crossed the hallway and bounded up the stairs two at a time. He paused outside Juliette Clayborn's closed door, listening. He knocked softly. No answer. Good. She was probably asleep.

Ralph Clayborn went slowly back downstairs. He poured another drink and sat in the dark, thinking as he sipped the whisky. After five minutes, he rose abruptly, tiptoed through the kitchen and out the back door. The garage was only a few steps away.

It was a two-car garage, but there was only one car in it now—a big, custom-built Cadillac. At the rear of the garage a steep stairway led to the half-story chauffeur's quarters. The Clayborns had not kept a chauffeur for more than a year.

At the top of the steps, Ralph Clayborn took out his keys, unlocked the door. The room was dark. In fact, he himself had removed the light bulbs a week earlier.

"That you, Ralph?" asked a listless voice in the dark.

Ralph Clayborn did not reply. He was staring at the gray oblong of a window in the wall opposite.

"So you opened the window anyhow," he said at last.

"I had to, Ralph."

Ralph crossed the room and pulled down the shade. Then he lighted a stump of candle. The yellow glow revealed a man sitting on the edge of a cot—a man who at first glance bore a striking resemblance to Ralph Clayborn. A second glance, however, would point up striking differences, as though a portrait had been retouched by the artist to endow the sitter with flattering qualities he did not possess. Ralph Clayborn was large, plump, red-faced and red-haired, the man on the cot was small, slim, pale and sandy-haired. Their features were of the same mould, but those of the man on the cot were somehow finer—his eyes were mild where Ralph's were hard; his mouth was good-natured where Ralph's was cruel.

"You damned idiot!" Ralph declared at last. "Why were you in Juliette's room tonight?"

"I couldn't help it, Ralph. She's been crying for two days. I can hear her from here. It was driving me nuts. You didn't explain to her like you promised, or she wouldn't be crying like that. I had to see her."

"How did you get out?"

"I jumped to the balcony. I'd never have had the nerve if it hadn't been for that." Bill Clayborn gestured vaguely toward the wash basin in the corner. On it stood a hypodermic syringe in a glass. "How much longer do I have to stay locked up in here before we get the money," he went on in a monotone. He passed his hand across his forehead. "Funny how I can't think, can't remember things any more. . . . I don't think it affected me that was before I quit using the stuff five years ago. It wasn't such a good idea of yours, Ralph, to start me on it again."

Ralph crossed the room to pick up the syringe. "Time for your medicine," he said.

"No, no, Ralph. No more. I'm better off without it."

"You'll need it. You've got a hard night ahead. In ten minutes we start on a long non-stop drive."

"Where to, Ralph?"

"Away. Mexico. Maybe Canada. We'll play it by ear."

"Did you tell Juliette?" Bill Clayborn asked. "She'll never be ready in ten minutes."

"Juliette's not going."

"Then I'm not going either."

"Juliette can join us later. She's got to stay here now to stall the cops."

"Cops? But why are the police—?"

"Because you screwed up the works with that ghost-walking act of yours! Because the bottom's fallen out of everything! Because the insurance people are after us for fraud!"

"That's not hard to fix," Bill Clayborn said. "I'll just show up and say I was suffering from amnesia."

"You can't show up, Bill. Your body has been properly identified and buried. You're dead and you've got to stay dead until we can get you out of the country as we planned."

Bill Clayborn was staring incredulously at his brother. Slowly a look of comprehension came into his glazed eyes. He winced as though he had been struck. "You mean—you killed somebody and buried him in my place?" he asked in horror-stricken tones.

"Never mind the details."

"But I do mind." A touch of color appeared in Bill's cheeks. "So that's why you brought me the needle to play with while I was hiding out! You've kept me hopped up so I couldn't object to adding murder to your scheme. You knew I'd go to the poor house before I'd touch money with blood on it. And I will yet. I'll go to jail. I'll tell them I may have been a party to fraud, but not to murder. I'll—"

"Don't be an idiot, Bill."

"I'm not an idiot. And I am not a murderer. Let them take the house. Let them close out the firm. I'm through. I'm going to talk." Bill's voice rose to an excited scream.

"Pipe down!" Ralph ordered.

"I won't—"

There was a sharp crack as Ralph's fist described a swift, upward arc, scraped the front of Bill's chest and smacked against the point of his chin.

Bill's head flopped back as if on hinges, like an iron duck in a shooting gallery. He fell like a log and lay still.

The window shade glared brightly for a moment, then went dark, as headlights swept into the driveway. Ralph Clayborn stepped over the prostrate form of his brother to snuff the candle. He stood a moment in the dark, listening. The motor stopped.

Ralph locked the door behind him and hurried down the steep stairs. Through a crack between the sliding garage doors he saw the lights of the car in the driveway wink out. A man got out of

the car and hurried toward the house. He whistled softly.

The man halted, turned, and started for the garage. Ralph stepped out to meet him. He was surprised at the Jekyll-Hyde change in Dr. Hines' face. The suave, urbane dentist had become a desperate criminal at bay.

"We've no time to lose," Hines panted. "I think I've killed a cop and I blinded that insurance dick. In about two minutes, the roof's going to fall in."

Ralph Clayborn did not move. "Bill's gone mad," he said. "He's been yelling that he's going to give himself up."

"Where's he now?"

"Up there. I had to slug him. He's out cold."

"Good." Hines took Ralph's arm and pushed him back into the garage. "Any of that stuff left?"

"Plenty."

"That simplifies matters. I'll mix an overdose. He won't even come to. The records will show that he was an addict five years ago. You can blame the whole plot on him, and collect the insurance money to boot. There'll be no doubt about his death this time. I'll hop a Pacific Clipper and you can send my fifty grand to Hong Kong. But if you try to hold out—"

"Look, Doc." Ralph held back. "After all, Bill's my brother...."

"He'd murder you, wouldn't he? Let him tell his story in court, and you're as good as dead. It's you or Bill."

"Just the same—"

"Don't argue." Hines punched something hard into the small of Ralph Clayborn's back. It was only the joint of his forefinger, but Ralph started climbing the stairs. As they climbed, Hines extracted an automatic from Ralph's back pocket.

When the two men had locked themselves into the chauffeur's quarters, Hines stationed himself at the window where he could watch the driveway. Then he began to give Ralph Clayborn directions.

When Detective-sergeant Pete Potrero left the dentist's office, he phoned for an ambulance for Summers. He toyed with the idea of calling for a few squad cars and a carload of plain-clothes men from Homicide, but thought better of it. After all, the case had turned into a private grudge-fight with old Doc Hines now. Single-handed, Hines had put both him and Summers out of commission. He was just as tough as Hines, wasn't he? And twice as smart. Hines must have thought he was dead, since he had not even bothered to disarm him. As his car whined up the hill, he touched his service revolver to reassure himself that it was still there.

He had the police chauffeur stop on the slope, half a block above the Clayborn residence. "If you hear fireworks, call the reserves," he told him. "Otherwise stay in the car till I come back."

He strode down the fog-wet sidewalk and into the Clayborn driveway. His head throbbed fiercely at every step, as though to remind him of his mission. Half way down the driveway, Potrero halted. The house was dark except for a faint light in one of the upstairs windows. Cautiously he approached the car standing in the driveway— Hines' car—and made sure it was unoccupied. He rounded a corner of the house and stopped for a moment, a dark blurr in the fog. Then he skirted the garage.

He was not watching the garage, however. His eyes were fixed on a small balcony protruding from the second story of the house, studying what seemed to be the figure of a woman. She stood back close to the wall of the house, a pale phantom in the night. She was wearing either a light-colored negligee or a nightgown. She was looking straight ahead. He could see in silhouette the tilt of her chin.

Potrero was so much interested in the woman that he was not aware that a window in the second story of the garage had opened slightly behind him. Neither did he see an arm suddenly detach itself from the shadow framed by the window—the head and shoulders of a man.

The woman on the balcony screamed.

Instinctively, Potrero dropped to the ground.

At the same instant, a spurt of flame roared from the garage window. Dirt and gravel sprayed into Potrero's face, as he snatched his revolver into action. He fired twice over his shoulder. From the garage window came two answering shots. The woman on the balcony was still screaming.

Potrero scrambled to his feet and ran for the garage, firing again. Again the window spurted flame.

Something struck Potrero with terrific force. He could not tell at first exactly where he had been hit, but he found himself once more on the ground. When he got up, his right leg was numb. He felt no pain. He could run with it, but the leg did not seem to belong to him. He ran into the garage, swept the darkness with his flashlight, found the stairs, started to climb.

The numbness suddenly dropped from his leg, which was immediately pierced by a thousand burning knives. A wave of nauseous weakness surged up in him, and perspiration beaded his forehead. Every step was torture, but he kept climbing. Sticky with warm blood, his trouser leg clung to his skin. At the top step he shouted: "Come on out, or I'll blow the door open." He fired through the door and jumped aside.

A shot came splintering through from the other side in reply.

Potrero sank to his knees. His head reeled. He felt his consciousness oozing away with the sticky

blood. He could not muster the strength to squeeze the trigger of his revolver. He slid down two stairs like a sack of cement.

After ten seconds of silence, the door opened cautiously. A hand grasped Potrero's outstretched arm and dragged him into the room. He was vaguely aware of what was going on, but it was all very far away and was happening to someone else. Then he sank into the void. He did not even hear the shriek of sirens.

Ralph Clayborn and Dr. Hines heard the sirens, but there was not much they could do about it. Potrero's chauffeur, having heard "fireworks," had obeyed instructions and called "the reserves." The place was swarming with cops. The squad cars were three-deep in the street. A searchlight gleamed on tommy-guns....

Detective-sergeant Potrero recovered consciousness in a hospital bed, his head bandaged, his right leg pointing skyward in traction, and Mr. George Summers of Seven Seas Casualty and Life lying in the next bed.

He was profanely gratified that the D.A.'s office had already issued complaints charging Ralph Clayborn and Dr. Matthew Hines with the murder of one Andrew Hughes.

"Tell me," said Potrero, "who is this guy Hughes and how did you find out?"

"Easy," said Summers. "The amalgam fillings made me suspicious and the X-ray of the dead man's broken arm made me sure that he wasn't William Clayborn. I began asking questions. I found out, among other things, that Billings, the present Clayborn butler, had been hired on the day before the Clayborn convertible was discovered wrecked and burned. I next found that there had been a constant stream of new butlers through Ralph Clayborn's household in the past six months, none remaining for more than a few weeks. All of these butlers were small, slight men, about the build of Bill Clayborn, men who could be mistaken for Bill Clayborn if disfigured in death.

"I found out that the last small butler before the hiring of the somewhat monumental Billings was named Andrew Hughes, who had apparently vanished into thin air, according to the employment agency that sent him to Clayborn. A long-distance call to the Pentagon established the fact that Andrew Hughes was a private in the 101st Airborne Division and had been wounded in the Battle of the Bulge; right arm badly shattered at Bastogne, in fact. The record of Lieutenant William Clayborn of G-2, on the other hand, bears no mention of wounds or other injury. So—"

"By the way," Potrero broke in, "what the hell happened to William Clayborn?"

"They tried to kill him with an overdose of some opiate," said Summers, "but as an old addict,

he'd developed quite a tolerance. Besides, the ambulance boys got him in time to shoot him full of caffein and atropine and give him the ice-water treatment. He's still pretty sick, but he'll probably live. He's got a very devoted nurse, anyhow—gal named Juliette."

"Juliette and the balcony," mused Potrero. "You know, if she hadn't screamed at me, I'd probably wouldn't be here now." He stole a glance at Summers' bandaged eyes, cleared his throat with an embarrassed sound, and resumed: "And what about...? I mean, well, I don't know exactly how to say this, but—"

"You mean my eyes?" Summers came to his rescue. "They say I can keep them—if I promise to look at nothing but the bright side of things in the future."

"Horse feathers!" exclaimed Potrero. "You'll see plenty of dirty pool before you quit looking." He chuckled. "I'm glad, Summers, because I guess I like you. You would probably make a pretty good cop."

RADAR EVIDENCE DOUBTED

But not on the Turnpike, we hasten to add!

This happened in Northumberland, in England, some months ago, when a fifty-eight year old gentleman farmer came before the magistrates, charged with having passed through a radar road trap at 45 miles per hour. The chairman, in handing down judgement, felt there was an element of doubt.

Counsel for the accused, who had pleaded not guilty, insisted that they "must choose between his sworn testimony that he was doing thirty miles per hour, and that of an animated machine which cannot be put on oath and cross-examined. Here is an honest citizen and a witness who has thirty-nine years of clean driving behind him. He did not exceed thirty miles per hour."

A police spokesman is quoted as agreeing that the system would obviously have to be reviewed in view of the decision, "which came as a surprise". It was the first time there had been an acquittal in a case of this kind. "But", he continued, "we have every confidence in radar and I cannot see how it can be changed for the better."

last curtain

by . . . . . Fredric Brown

THE BAR in front of him was wet and sloppy. Sir Charles Hanover Gresham carefully rested his forearms on the raised dry rim of it and held the folded copy of *Stagecraft* that he was reading up out of the puddles. His forearms, not his elbows; when you have but one suit and it is getting threadbare you remember not to rest your elbows on a bar or a table. Just as, when you sit, you always pull up the trouser legs an inch or two to keep the knees from becoming baggy. When you are an actor you remember those things. Even if you're a has-been who never really was and who certainly never will be, living —barely—off blackmail, drinking beer in a Bowery bar, hung-over and miserable, at two o'clock on a cool fall afternoon, you remember.

But you always read *Stagecraft.*

He was reading it now. "Gambler Angels Meller," a one-column headline told him; he read even that, casually. Then he came to a name in the second paragraph, the name of the playwright. One of his eyebrows rose a full millimeter at that name. Wayne Campbell, his *patron,* had written another play. The first in three full years. Not that that mattered

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Fredric Brown, author of more than thirty novels, has long been considered one of the most important writers in the field — important for his adherence to values such as are found in this story, first published more than twelve years ago. Then, as now, his people are alive and credible — even as they face death... *H.S.S.*

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to Wayne, for his last play and his second last had both sold to Hollywood for very substantial sums. New plays or no, Wayne Campbell would keep on eating caviar and drinking champagne. And new plays or no, he, Sir Charles Hanover Gresham, would keep on eating hamburger sandwiches and drinking beer. It was the only thing he was ashamed of —not the hamburgers and the beer, but the means by which he was forced to obtain them. Blackmail is a nasty word; he hated it.

But now, possibly, just possibly—

Even that chance was worth celebrating. He looked at the bar in front of him; fifteen cents lay there. He took his last dollar bill from his pocket and put it down on the one dry spot on the bar.

"Mac!" he said.

Mac, the bartender, who had been gazing into space through the wall, came over. He asked, "The same, Charlie?"

"Not the same, Mac. This time the amber fluid."

"You mean whiskey?"

"I do indeed. One for you and one for me. *Ah, with the Grape my fading life provide. . .*"

Mac poured two shots and refilled Sir Charles's beer glass. "Chaser's on me."

Sir Charles raised his shot glass and looked past it, not at Mac the bartender but at his own reflection in the smeary backbar mirror. A quite distinguished-looking gentleman stared back at him. They smiled at one another; then they both looked at Mac, one of them from the front, the other from the back.

"To your excellent health, Mac," they said— Sir Charles aloud and his reflection silently. The raw, cheap whiskey burned a warm and grateful path.

Mac looked over and said, "You're a screwy guy, Charlie, but I like you. Sometimes I think you really *are* a knight; I dunno."

"A Hair perhaps divides the False and True," said Sir Charles. "Do you by any chance know Omar, Mac?"

"Omar who?"

"The tentmaker. A great old boy, Mac; he's got me down to a T. Listen to this:

"After a momentary silence spake
Some Vessel of a more ungainly Make:
'They sneer at me from leaning all awry:
What! did the Hand then of the Potter shake?'"

Mac said, "I don't get it."

Sir Charles sighed. "Am I all awry, Mac? Seriously, I'm going to phone and make an important appointment, maybe. Do I look all right or am I leaning all awry? Oh, Lord, Mac, I just thought what that would make me. Ham awry."

"You look all right, Charlie."

"But, Mac, you missed that horrible pun. Ham awry. Ham on rye."

"You want a sandwich?"

Sir Charles smiled gently. He said, "I'll change my mind, Mac; I'm not hungry after all. But perhaps the exchequer will stand another drink."

It stood another drink. Mac went to another customer.

The haze was coming, the gentle haze. The figure in the back-bar mirror smiled at him as though they had a secret in common. And they had, but the drinks were helping them to forget it—at least to shove it to the back of the mind. Now, through the gentle haze that was not really drunkenness, that figure in the mirror did not say, "You're a fraud and a failure, Sir Charles, living on blackmail," as it so often and so accusingly had said. No, now it said, "You're a fine fellow, Sir Charles; a little down on your luck for these last few—let us not say how many—years. Things are going to change. You'll walk the boards again; once more you'll hold audiences in the palm of your hand. You're an *actor,* man."

He downed his second shot and then, sipping his beer slowly, he reread the article in *Stagecraft* headlined "Gambler Angels Meller."

There wasn't much detail, but there was enough. The name of the melodrama was *The Perfect Crime,* which didn't matter; the author was Wayne Campbell, which did matter. Wayne could try to get him into the cast; Wayne would try. And not because of threat of blackmail; quite the converse . . .

And, although this didn't matter either, the play was being backed by Nick Corianos. Maybe, come to think of it, that did matter. Nick Corianos was a plunger, a real big-shot. *The Perfect Crime* wouldn't lack for funds, not if Nick was backing it. You've heard of Nick Corianos. Legend has it that he once dropped half a million dollars in a single 40-hour session of poker, and laughed about it. Legend says many unpleasant things about him, too, but the police have never proved them.

Sir Charles smiled at the thought: Nick Corianos getting away with *The Perfect Crime.* He wondered if that thought had come to Corianos, if it was part of his reason for backing this particular play. One of life's little pleasures, thinking such things. Posing, posturing, knowing you were a cheat and a failure, you lived on the little pleasures—and the big dreams.

Still smiling gently, he went into the phone booth at the front of the tavern near the door. He dialed Wayne Campbell's number. He said, "Wayne? This is Charles Gresham."

"Yes?"

"May I see you—at your office?"

"Now listen, Gresham, if it's more money, no. You've got some coming in three days and you agreed, definitely agreed, that if I gave you that amount regularly, you'd—"

"Wayne, it's not money. The opposite, my dear boy. I can save you money."

"How?" He was cold, suspicious.

"You'll be casting for your new play. Oh, I know you don't do the actual casting yourself, but a word from you, Wayne, would get me a part. Even a walk-on, Wayne, anything, and I won't bother you again."

"While the play runs, you mean?"

Sir Charles cleared his throat. He said, regretfully, "Of course, while the play runs. But if it's a play of yours, Wayne, it may run a long time."

"You'd get drunk and get fired before it was out of rehearsal."

"No. I don't drink when I'm working, Wayne. What have you to lose? I won't disgrace you. You know I can act. Don't you?"

"Yes." It was grudging, but it was a yes. "All right—you've got a point if it'll save me money. And it's a cast of fourteen; I suppose I could—"

"I'll be right over, Wayne. And thanks, thanks a lot."

He felt the booth and went outside, quickly, into the cool, crisp air, before he'd be tempted to take another drink to celebrate the fact that he would be on the boards again. *Might be,* he corrected himself quickly. Even with help from Wayne Campbell, it was no certainty.

He shivered a little, walking to the subway. He'd have to buy himself a coat out of his next—allowance. It was turning colder; he shivered more as he walked from the subway to Wayne's office. But Wayne's office was warm, if Wayne wasn't. Wayne sat there staring at him.

Finally he said, "You don't look the part, Gresham. Damn it all, you don't look it. And that's funny."

Sir Charles said, "I don't know why it's funny, Wayne. But looking the part means nothing. There is such a thing as make-up, such a thing as acting. A true actor can look any part."

Surprisingly, Wayne was chuckling with amusement.

He said, "You don't know it's funny, Gresham, but it is. I've got two possibilities you can try for. One of them is practically a walk-on; you'd get three short speeches. The other—"

"Yes?"

"It is funny, Gresham. There's a blackmailer in my play. And damn it all, you are one; you've been living off me for five years now."

Sir Charles said, "Very reasonably, Wayne. You must admit my demands are modest, and that I've never increased them."

"You are a very paragon of blackmailers, Gresham. I assure you it's a pleasure—practically. But the cream of the jest would be letting you play the blackmailer in my play so that for the duration of it I wouldn't be pay-

ing you blackmail. And it's a fairly strong supporting role; it'd pay you a lot more than you have been asking from me. But—"

"But what?"

"Damned if you look it! I don't think you'd be convincing as a blackmailer. You're always so apologetic and ashamed about it—and yes, I know, you wouldn't be doing it if you could earn your eats—and drinks—any other way. But the blackmailer in my play is a fairly hardboiled mug. Has to be. People wouldn't believe in anybody like you, Gresham."

"Give me a chance at it, Wayne. Let me read the part."

"I think we'd better settle for the smaller role. You said you'd settle for a walk-on, and this other part is little better than that. But you're just not a heavy, Gresham."

"At least let me read it."

Wayne Campbell shrugged. He pointed to a bound manuscript on a corner of his desk, nearer to Sir Charles than to him. He said, "Okay, the role is Richter. Your biggest scene, your longest and most dramatic speech, is about two pages back of the first-act curtain. Go ahead and read it to me."

Sir Charles's fingers trembled just slightly with eagerness as he found the first-act curtain and thumbed back. He said, "Let me read it to myself first, Wayne, to get the sense of it." It was a longish speech, but he read it rapidly twice and he had it; memorizing had always been easy for him. He put down the manuscript and thought an instant to put himself in the mood.

His face grew cold and hard, his eyes hooded. He stood up and leaned his hands on the desk, caught Wayne's eyes with his own, and poured on the speech, his voice cold and precise and deadly.

And it was balm to his actor's soul that Wayne's eyes widened as he listened to it. He said, "I'll be damned. You *can* act. Okay, I'll try to get you the role. I didn't think you had it in you, but you have. Only if you cross me up by drinking—"

"I won't." Sir Charles sat down; he had been calm and cold during the speech. Now he was trembling again and he didn't want it to show. Wayne might think it was drink or poor health, and not know that it was eagerness and excitement. This might be the start of it, the come-back he'd hoped for—he hated to think how long it had been that he'd been hoping. But one good supporting role, and in a Wayne Campbell play that might have a long run, and he'd be on his way. Producers would notice him and there'd be another and slightly better role when this play ended, and a better one after that.

He knew he was kidding himself, but the excitement, the *hope* was here. It went to his head like stronger drink than any tavern served.

Maybe he'd even have a chance to play again in a Shakespeare revival, and there are always Shakespeare revivals. He knew most of every major Shakespearean role, although he'd played only minor ones. Macbeth, that great speech of Macbeth's—

He said, "I wish you were Shakespeare, Wayne. I wish you were just writing Macbeth. Beautiful stuff in there, Wayne. Listen:

"Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all of our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out—"

"Brief candle, and so on. Sure, it's beautiful and I wish, too, that I were Shakespeare, Gresham. But I haven't got all day to listen."

Sir Charles sighed and stood up. Macbeth had stood him in good stead; he wasn't trembling any more. He said, "Nobody ever has time to listen. Well, Wayne, thanks tremendously."

"Wait a minute. You sound as though I'm doing the casting and have already signed you. I'm only the first hurdle. We're going to let the director do the actual casting, with Corianos's and my advice and consent, but we haven't hired a director yet. I think it's going to be Dixon, but it isn't 100 per cent sure yet."

"Shall I go talk to him? I know him slightly."

"Ummm—not till it's definite. If I send you to him, he'll be sure we are hiring him, and maybe he'll want more money. Not that it won't take plenty to get him anyway. But you can talk to Nick; he's putting up the money and he'll have a say in the casting."

"Sure, I'll do that, Wayne."

Wayne reached for his wallet. "Here's twenty bucks," he said. "Straighten out a little; get a shave and a haircut and a clean shirt. Your suit's all right. Maybe you should have it pressed. And listen—"

"Yes?"

"That twenty's no gift. It comes out of your next."

"More than fair. How shall I handle Corianos? Sell him on the idea that I can handle the part, as I did you?"

Wayne Campbell grinned. He said, *"Speak the speech, I pray you, as you have pronounced it to me, trippingly on the tongue; but if you mouth it, as many of your players do, I had as lief the town-crier spoke my lines. Nor do not saw the air—* I can recite Shakespeare, too."

"We'll not mention how." Sir Charles smiled. "Thanks a million, Wayne. Goodbye."

He got the haircut, which he needed, and the shave, which he

didn't really need—he had shaved that morning. He bought a new white shirt and had his shoes shined and his suit pressed. He had his soul lifted with three Manhattans in a respectable bar; three, sipped slowly, and no more. And he ate—the three cherries from the Manhattans.

The backbar mirror wasn't smeary. It was blue glass, though, and it made him look sinister. He smiled a sinister smile at his reflection. He thought, *Blackmailer. The role; play it to the hilt, throw yourself into it. And some day you'll play Macbeth.*

Should he try it on the bartender? No. He had tried it on bartenders before.

The blue reflection in the backbar mirror smiled at him. He looked from it to the front windows and the front windows, too, were faintly blue with dusk. And that meant it was time. Corianos might be in the office above his club by now.

He went out into the blue dusk. He took a cab. Not for practical reasons; it was only ten blocks and he could easily have walked. But, psychologically, a cab was important. As important as was an oversize tip to the driver.

The Blue Flamingo, Nick Corianos's current club, was still closed, of course, but the service entrance was open. Sir Charles went in. One waiter was working, putting cloths on tables. Sir Charles asked, "Please direct me to Mr. Corianos's office?"

"Third floor. There's a self-service elevator over there." He pointed, and, looking again at Sir Charles, he added, "Sir."

"Thank you," said Sir Charles.

He took the elevator to the third floor. It let him off in a dimly lighted corridor, from which opened several doors. Only one door had a light behind it showing through the ground glass. It was marked *Private.* He tapped on it gently; a voice called out, "Come in." He went in. Two big men were playing gin rummy across a desk.

One of them asked him, "Yeah?"

"Is either of you Mr. Corianos?"

"What do you want to see him about?"

"My card, sir." Sir Charles handed it to the one who had spoken; he felt sure by looking at them that neither one was Nick Corianos. "Will you tell Mr. Corianos that I wish to speak to him about a matter in connection with the play he is backing?"

The man who had spoken looked at the card. He said, "Okay," put down his hand of cards, walked to the door of an inner office and through it. After a moment he appeared at the door again; he said, "Okay." Sir Charles went in.

Nick Corianos looked up from the card lying on the ornate mahogany desk before him. He asked, "Is it a gag?"

"Is what a gag?"

"Sit down. Is it a gag, or are you really Sir Charles Hanover Gresham? I mean, are you really a—that would be a knight, wouldn't it?"

Sir Charles smiled. "I have never yet admitted, in so many words, that I am not. Would it not be foolish to start now? At any rate, it gets me in to see people much more easily."

Nick Corianos laughed. He said, "I see what you mean. And I'm beginning to guess what you want. You're a ham, aren't you?"

"I am an actor. I have been informed that you are backing a play; in fact, I have seen a script of the play. I am interested in playing the role of Richter."

Nick Corianos frowned. "Richter—that's the name of the blackmailer in the play?"

"It is." Sir Charles held up a hand. "Please do not tell me offhand that I do not look the part. A true actor can look, and can be, anything. I can be a blackmailer."

Nick Corianos said, "Possibly. But I'm not handling the casting."

Sir Charles smiled, and then let the smile fade. He stood up and leaned forward, his hands resting on Nick's mahogany desk. He smiled again, but the smile was different. His voice was cold, precise. He said, *"Listen pal, you can't shove me off. I know too much. Maybe I can't prove it myself, but the police can, once I tell them where to look. Walter Donovan. Does that name mean anything to you, pal? Or the date September first? Or a spot a hundred yards off the road to Bridgeport, halfway between Stamford and there. Do you think you can—"*

"That's enough," Nick said. There was an ugly black automatic in his right hand. His left was pushing a buzzer on his desk.

Sir Charles Hanover Gresham stared at the automatic, and he saw it; not only the automatic, but everything. He saw death, and for just a second, there was panic.

And then all the panic was gone, and there was left a vast amusement.

It had been perfect, all down the line. *The Perfect Crime*—advertised as such, and he hadn't guessed it. He hadn't even suspected it.

And yet, he thought, why wouldn't—why shouldn't— Wayne Campbell be tired enough of a blackmailer who had bled him, however mildly, for so many years? And why wouldn't one of the best playwrights in the world be clever enough to do it this way?

So clever, and so simple, however Wayne had come across the information against Nick Corianos which he had written on a special page, especially inserted in his copy of the script. *Speak the speech, I pray you—*

And he had even known that he, Charles, wouldn't give him away. Even now, before the trigger was pulled, he could blurt:

"Wayne Campbell knows this, too. He did it, not I!"

But even to say that now couldn't save him, for that black automatic had turned fiction into fact, and although he might manage Campbell's death along with his own, it wouldn't save his own life. Wayne had even known him well enough to know, to be sure, that he wouldn't do that—at no advantage to himself.

He stood up straight, taking his hands off the desk but carefully keeping them at his sides, as the two big men came through the wide doorway that led to the outer office.

Nick said, "Pete, get that canvas mail-sack out of the drawer. And is the car in front of the service entrance?"

"Sure, chief." One of the men ducked back through the door.

Nick hadn't taken his eyes—or the cold muzzle of the gun—off Sir Charles.

Sir Charles smiled at him. He said, "May I ask a boon?"

"What?"

"A favor. Besides the one you already intend to do for me. I ask thirty-five seconds."

"Huh?"

"I've timed it; it should take that long. Most actors do it in thirty—they push the pace. I refer, of course, to the immortal lines from Macbeth. Have I your permission to die thirty-five seconds from now, rather than at this exact instant?"

Nick's eyes got even narrower. He said, "I don't get it, but what's thirty-five seconds, if you really keep your hands in sight?"

Sir Charles said, *"Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow—"*

One of the big men was back in the doorway, something made of canvas rolled up under his arm. He asked, "Is the guy screwy?"

"Shut up," Nick said.

And then no one was interrupting him.

No one was even impatient. And thirty-five seconds were ample.

"... Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more; it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing."

He paused, and the quiet pause lengthened.

He bowed slightly and straightened so the audience would know that there was no more. And then Nick's finger tightened on the trigger.

The applause was deafening.

jamaican rose

by . . . . . Sax Rohmer

"WHY SHOULD Dick have wanted to die? I was so fond of him. We were going to England together. You knew?"

I watched her across the little table. Sensitive, full lips quivered, like the lips of a child about to cry.

It was uncomfortably hot, as Kingston sometimes can be. Even under the long, shaded portico heat seemed to reach in with clammy fingers. A gardener at work near by glistened as though his black body had been boiled in oil. And out on Harbour Street a hawker was crying his wares in a voice which transported me to Africa.

"Yes, I know. And I don't think he *did* want to die."

Long, amber eyes, fringed by longer lashes than I had ever believed to be possible, questioned mine. And her eyes, too, were the eyes of a child. I noticed that where everyone else was hot, her bare shoulders looked enticingly cool. I was reminded of the bloom on ripening apricots.

I was puzzled. I had looked forward to meeting Rose (I had no idea if she had another name) with an interest not entirely personal. And I had been disappointed.

Sax Rohmer, as we have often said, contributed much to the myth of the sinister oriental and to the picture of a "Chinatown" where "all the cunning of the Orient" could be found at will. It comes as a shock to many, therefore, that he could also write stories such as THE SPIRIT OF THE BLACK HAWK (May 1962, SMM) and this story, set in pre-Independence Jamaica, about a woman whose smile could mean a horrible death...

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Poor Dick Adams, in his letters home, had simply raved about her—raved. She was, he said, the most beautiful girl he had ever seen. Well, I had had a look at her in the club called Drake's Drum the night before. Now, this morning, I was having another good look at her in tropical daylight. And all my expectations were shot to hell.

She was beautiful. She was lovely.

"Do you mean—" a slow, soft voice—"that you think it might have been an accident?"

I clapped my hands to attract the attention of a walking-dead man dressed as a waiter—and also to get time to think.

Rose shook her head, so that reflected sunrays touching the long, blue-black hair made it glitter like a raven's wing. She smiled, a sweet smile which showed small, milky teeth.

"Just orange, please."

I ordered it, with another planter's punch for myself. As the zombie retired:

"I hardly meant that, Rose," I said. "I was thinking perhaps he had an enemy in Rio."

She slightly extended slender hands and shrugged in a Gallic fashion. The movement made dimples come on her shoulders. There was unconscious grace in every movement.

"Who could be Dick's enemy?"

She had me there. I couldn't imagine anybody hating Dick Adams. But I was equally unable to swallow the report that he had committed suicide. Not if I knew Dick, he hadn't; and so:

"What about Santos Doro?" I asked. "He can't have loved him."

You see, I was hunting for confirmation of my own private theories about the death of Dick Adams. He had asked me to fly over to Rio to meet a wonderful girl he had found there. It's true I could have gone, but it would have been inconvenient—and I thought Dick would live it down, anyway; thought he was crazy. It tortured me to reflect that if I had done what he asked, I might have averted a tragedy.

This time, I was making no mistake. Max Reval was caught in the same web; I didn't mean to lose another old friend if I could do anything to stop it.

"Yes. I was with Santos' Band in Rio—when Dick died."

The sleep-walking waiter placed drinks on the table, and dispersed.

"You met Doro here in Jamaica didn't you?"

"Yes." Her glance was beginning to wander oddly from shrub to palm, seeking in shadowy places. "Santos taught me how to be a success. That's something, isn't it?" She sipped her orange juice. "But, in Rio, I was trying to get away from him. Santos would not leave the marihuana alone. Sometimes he was quite mad. I thought he might kill me, one night. Also, I didn't want to be with him any more."

She smiled again. It was a shy smile, infinitely charming, the full lips revealing those small teeth. It was an ingenuous smile; for it didn't say, "Do you think I am clever?" or "Do you want to make love to me?" It said, simply, "Please like me."

And, against that tropical background, it brought enlightenment. Heaven alone knew the history of Rose's pedigree; but, somewhere, however far back, she was African—and at last I stood on firm ground. One point became clear to my mind. Whatever had brought Dick's death about, this girl was innocent of any conscious part in it.

But, as the amber eyes furtively renewed that restless search, I, too, became haunted by a persistent idea that someone was watching me secretly. I don't mean enviously because I was in such charming company; I mean that I sensed evil thoughts focussed upon me.

It was a queer impression; stupid, as I supposed at the time, and I made an effort to shake it off.

"You left Doro soon after Dick's death, didn't you?"

"Yes. But not to go to anyone else. I came back alone to Jamaica."

"What did Doro do about it?"

Her eyes were still questing in the shadows.

"I didn't tell him. Santos never knew, until I had gone. It could have made no difference. The marihuana had finished him."

There is a passive acceptance of things as they come which only the African knows. It is the legacy of hereditary memory. This girl could have passed for Spanish or for French. She was beautiful—but she didn't know it. She was amoral, because remote ancestors had had no choice. She was innocent as a babe—because she was African.

She had been recognized. I heard someone say, sotto voice, "It's Jamaican Rose, isn't it—the girl from Drake's Drum?"

An Airways bus discharged passengers and their baggage, and I idly watched the little procession filing into the hotel. I reflected that Max Reval was due by Air France that evening, and wondered what I should say to him. I turned to Rose.

I wondered how old she was. African blood ages women. She looked very young. I guessed her to be in her teens.

"And now you are going to Paris?"

My words seemed to recall her from a reverie. She started, then nodded.

"Yes. I expect Max has told you all about it. Isn't it wonderful? I have always longed to see Paris."

"You speak French, of course?"

"But of course. My mother came from Haiti. We always spoke French together."

And, as she pronounced the name, Haiti, it happened—that incomprehensible thing which, through seemingly trivial, meant

so much, being the clue to one man's death and a promise of death to another.

A round, greyish pellet, about the size of a large pill, dropped on the table immediately between us—

I stared, glanced up and then all around. I was intrigued, no more.

But the effect upon Rose was astounding.

She stifled a scream, dropped her hands to the table edge and thrust herself back in her chair—staring, staring at the little pellet. The amber eyes were wide open. Their expression was one of sheer horror!

That seeking gaze swept the shrubbery, searched more distant shadows, then came back to me. She reached across and seized my hand. I had just picked up the pellet.

"Whatever's the matter? It's only a bit of rolled bread."

But the touch of her fingers told me how wildly agitated she was.

"Will you do something for me? Please! Please!"

"Of course. But what's the matter?"

"Don't let Max come to see me tonight. Make him wait until I call him. Promise you won't let him come...."

This problem went deeper than I had bargained for. Already I was out of my depth, wished I had someone to consult who had greater experience of such mysteries. Rose had asked me to release her from our lunch date.... "I am so, so sorry. Some time perhaps I may explain. But please forgive me, I must hurry back...."

All utterly confusing; completely unaccountable.

An expensive cable from my theatrical friend, Max Reval, to my hotel in Palm Beach had brought me by the first available plane to Jamaica. This time it meant a short journey, and I was taking no second chance. It invited me to join him in Kingston to meet a girl who (I quote the cable) "will be the rage of Paris." He had spent two or three weeks here a month earlier and had met this future star. "She is called Jamaican Rose. She is exquisite. I have booked her for the new Casino de Paris revue...."

Jamaican Rose! I remember how I turned cold when I read that name. It had been liberally sprinkled through all poor Dick Adams' letters from Rio. Now—here was another fly entangled in the fatal web.

I had prudently arrived a day ahead of Max, whose cable had said, "If you should be there first, present yourself; she knows of you." I had watched Jamaican Rose's performance at Drake's Drum and then called around to her dressing room, making a lunch date for the following day.

And I have told you what happened....

Haitian might mean anything, and Caribbean types were strange to me. But what was the meaning

of the bread pellet?

Why had Jamaican Rose been so terrified—so terrified that all her warm coloring had faded from her cheeks?

In my room in the annex of the hotel I pulled the pellet to pieces, carefully. It was merely a bullet made of soft bread, now hard and brittle. There was nothing inside it. But where had it come from? Certainly, from none of the surrounding tables where everyone was drinking and no one eating. And what was its significance?

I could visualize Rose's eyes when I had seen her off in a taxi —darting quick glances right and left, seeking for something, for someone. I recalled my own uneasiness just before the thing had happened.

My imagination threatened to run riot, and I checked its crazy promptings by looking out of the window at girls in bathing kit with their escorts, young British naval officers and American Air Force pilots, coming up from the pool to lunch. Here was Today before my eyes. I must not allow morbid imaginings to drag me back into a shadowy West African Yesterday. Voodoo? Rubbish!

But what did that pellet mean?

A certain element of skill is involved in flicking a small ball of bread onto a selected target in such a way that it drops dead like a golf ball lofted skillfully onto a green.

I went down to lunch....

A side table from which one overlooked the garden had been reserved. I told the head waiter that I should be lunching alone, and I lunched in the company of a small green lizard who seemed to like me. Palms, a blaze of tropical flowers; gaily colored birds, laughing voices—and Max Reval due at six o'clock.

"She will be the rage of Paris...." I was ready to believe that she would be a rage anywhere. She had a mezzo-soprano voice, untrained, but sweet and true, with a throb running through its notes hard to define. She brought to the commonplace numbers she sang a sort of pagan beauty which was queerly moving.

And she looked like some nymph from the dreams of a Greek poet. Her youthful body had the grace of a gazelle. But when I had talked to her about the tragedy in Rio, her interest, sincere, sympathetic, emotional, was not that of one so recently bereaved—of a woman whose lover had died before her eyes less than six months ago. We might have been discussing the death of a stranger.

So my thoughts ran, right out of tune with my gay surroundings, when again that uncomfortable conviction claimed me, a conviction that I was being watched—evilly. This idea crept over me like a shadow. I began peering into shrubs aflame with scarlet flowers, then into more distant, shaded prospects, just as I had seen Rose doing.

I scanned every table in sight,

but failed to find anyone even remotely sinister. Yet, the thing persisted; some spiritual awareness, I can't hope to describe it, of being watched.

Max Reval's plane evidently arrived on time, for I had only just walked out to the front entrance when he came running in. He wore a beret, an open-necked shirt of lavender color, white trousers with a lavender stripe and sandals. Max dressed like a normal human being would not have been Max.

"Ah, my old! This is joyous!"

He threw his arms around my shoulders and searched my face with those keen grey eyes.

"Tell me—I am all excitement —you have seen her?"

"Yes. I called last night."

"Ah! So impatient, eh? And she is, of all the beautiful women of all time, the most exquisite? Was I wrong?"

"You are rarely wrong about women," I replied cautiously.

"And already we are rivals? You are madly in love? Yes?"

He slapped me on the back, his teeth flashing in a gay laugh. Calling something across to the office about his baggage, he linked an arm in mine and led me out to the bar which faces the gardens.

"We shall drink to Jamaican Rose."

Seated on tall stools before coolly tinkling tumblers, I made a plunge into the conversation which I knew had to come.

"What are your plans, Max?"

"My plans? But they are simple. I shall enshrine her in an apartment—most elegant—which I have rented, and two clever fellows are already at work on new songs for her. Here is no microphone murmurer. No! Her natural voice would reach the upper benches of the Opera. Very well. In three months Paris will adore her. In six months she will run away from me with some Hollywood producer. Those are my plans!"

I drank thoughtfully, staring at a row of bottles directly in front of me.

"You see, Max—" I spoke very deliberately— "there is an element of mystery about Jamaican Rose. You know she came here from Rio?"

"Not all all. How should I know? Why should I care? Mystery! But certainly. It is this aureole mystique which will take Paris by storm."

"No doubt. But that's not quite what I meant. I don't think you ever knew my friend, Dick Adams. He was in Rio last year while Rose was there. He fell for her—"

"But of course!"

"And then, he died"

Max Reval, leaned towards me, twisting his tall stool so that we faced one another directly.

"What are you proposing to me, my old? That Jamaican Rose killed this poor fellow?"

"Not at all. In the first place, it wasn't possible. She was too far away."

"How, then, and where, did the unhappy Adams die?"

"In the hotel where she was singing, and just as she had finished. He raised his glass to her, drank, and fell dead."

The olive-skinned, mobile face, so close to mine, displayed such a variety of swift expressions that none of them could be identified.

"He had a weak heart. Yes?"

"Not at all. He was poisoned. A verdict of suicide was brought in."

"Of suicide? She had driven this devoted one to despair! Ah! But this is tragic!"

"More tragic than you imagine. Because I am quite sure Dick did not commit suicide. Someone murdered him!"

Max stared at me.

"You mean—the beautiful one? Are you mad, then?"

"I mean nothing of the kind, Max. What I'm trying to tell you is that a sort of fatality seems to surround this girl. I'm ready to swear she was innocent of any share in Dick's death. But she is afraid—"

"Afraid? Afraid of what, if you please?"

I hesitated. The bread pellet incident, my own impression of being watched, it was difficult, I recognized, to make convincing. And so I answered simply:

"Your safety, I think. She begged me—implored me—to dissuade you from seeing her tonight . . ."

If you had known Max Reval, as I knew him, you would have foreseen the outcome of this.

He laughed. Then he grew angry, suspicious. But these moods passed in turn. He called Jamaican Rose at her apartment, but could get no reply. He called the office of the night club. She was not expected before nine or ten o'clock. He was in despair. He was laughing again. He was Max Reval.

We dined together at the table where I had lunched alone. Moonlight silvered the garden, painting mysterious shadows under the palms. Figures seemed to materialize out of those shadows, to cease to be phantoms, become human beings, as they were claimed by the light cast out from the dining room.

I think I remember every incident, however trivial, of that dinner.

No message had come . . .

Max wore a small red rose in the buttonhole of his pale lavender tuxedo. He saw me smiling.

"Yes—it is a Jamaican rose," he said.

And, even as he spoke, I began to be haunted again.

Max was bothered, in doubt, in suspense, but he laughed gaily as he described some of the comedy items which would enliven the new Casino production. I, also, was bothered, in doubt and in suspense, so that my attention strayed—for I knew that we were being watched.

It was then, on this evening

which I can never forget, that I had my first glimpse of the watcher.

He stood so still, in a strip of solid shadow like an ebony carpet cast by a royal palm, that if someone in a room above the restaurant had not switched the light up, I should never have seen him.

Even in that momentary flash (for a blind was lowered at once), all I saw was a whitish blur of indistinguishable features—and a pair of blazing eyes—the eyes of a ravenous beast, bloodlustful, implacable, their gaze fixed upon Max Reval.

I was chilled, and, yes, let me confess it, frightened. But I acted swiftly. I stood up.

"Excuse me for a moment, Max. I have seen someone I want to speak to."

I moved to the opening and went down two steps onto a sandy path. Then, watching the smooth mast of the palm, I began to walk towards it.

And when I arrived—there was nobody there—

I couldn't get Max away quickly enough. The menace had taken shape, for no one could have misread the message in those awful eyes, but I had no idea what to expect, what to guard against.

One thing was clear enough. Jamaican Rose knew that Max was in danger. Imagination suggested a variety of crazy ideas to account for what had happened, including a theory that she belonged to a Haitian secret society, that the bread pellet was some sort of sign.

But I rejected them all, as utterly fantastic.

I got him along to the bar, and then back into the hotel. Max called Rose's apartment again; still no reply. And so it happened that no contact of any kind had been made right up to the time that we arrived at Drake's Drum —for nothing short of *force majeure* could have kept Max away that night.

As those who have been there may remember, Drake's Drum (a large, illuminated drum hangs over the entrance) is a sort of half patio, one side opening onto a terrace discreetly lighted, furnished with chairs and tables and served from a side bar.

Otherwise, the place is a pretty ordinary night club, but in the season it is usually well patronized.

The manager led us to a table on the edge of the dance floor, but:

"No, no my friend," Max protested. "Less conspicuous, if you please. My friend and I are of retiring dispositions."

And so we presently settled down at a table set against one of the terrace pillars. I ordered drinks (Max insisted upon champagne) and looked around. The night was little cooler than the day had been, and I wondered

what possessed anybody to want to dance in such a climate. One thing struck me as odd. A Jamaican police sergeant and a constable were seated just inside the door.

Max met my glance.

"What occurs, *mon vieux?* Why the gendarmes?"

I shook my head. Then I began to search the shadows outside.

Some desultory dancing came to an end, and a waiter placed an ice-bucket beside our table. He pulled the cork of the wine, and filled our glasses.

Max was too preoccupied to notice, for a change in the lighting and a rearrangement of chairs amongst some of the patrons indicated that Jamaican Rose was now about to appear.

"Lean well forward, if you please," Max said. "As I am *de trop* tonight I do not wish to be revealed until she completes her performance."

And then Jamaican Rose came out, very quietly, and stood beside the piano.

She was received with applause which she acknowledged by smiling and nodding slightly. She wore a pale green frock, with a plunging neckline, which did nothing to conceal the slim beauty of her shape. Her raven hair was dressed in a highly original way. It was swept around and forward from one side so that it hung over her left shoulder, where it was kept in place by a clasp to which was attached a large yellow rose.

Her glance swept the room, but she couldn't see Max from where she stood, and I lowered my head to prevent her recognizing me. I had been here only the night before, and so, for all her poise, I knew that she was nervous to the verge of collapse. I looked back, quickly. People from the terrace tables had crowded to the openings.

She began to sing; she didn't use a microphone; and as she sang I thought that she was recovering confidence—but I watched watched for and saw the amber eyes questing in shadowy places.

The audience would have kept her all night, I think. Jamaican Rose undoubtedly had whatever it is that makes a popular performer. But as she began her fourth and last song, I stole a look at Max. His eyes were devouring her. How much was professional appreciation and how much passion, only Max himself could have told me.

She finished to a tornado of clapping.

"Lean back, if you please."

I did so, and Max stood up, wineglass raised.

"Bravo!" he cried, *"ma belle* Rose!"

My interest was divided between my friend and this girl on the platform. This was fortunate; for as Jamaican Rose turned, saw Max, and seemed to become rigid with terror, out of the corner of

my eye I saw something else. It was this:

A sudden slight splash in the uplifted champagne glass, a splash not due to bubbles, and an impression (no more) of some nearly transparent object disappearing in the wine.

Max, meeting the stare of amber eyes, raised the glass to his lips.

"No!"

It was a scream.

Max had no more than sipped when I dashed the glass from his hand.

He turned a furious glance upon me... Then, he clutched his throat, as a torrent of words poured from Jamaican Rose.

"There! *There!* He is there! Arrest him! Arrest him!"

The two police were racing across the dance floor. She stood, a quivering finger pointing... and for the second time in one night I saw that ghastly pallid face, those blazing eyes, over the heads of a group crowded in one of the openings. The police burst through.

I caught Max Reval as he collapsed across the table.

"Is there a doctor here?" I shouted, desperately.

By the mercy of God, there was; and he knew his business.

He administered an extemporized emetic. He got ammonia from the kitchen.

"Cyanide," he said, raising his sweat-grimed face. "Smell it? Prussic acid. But, heaven be praised, a small dose."

Max was still unconscious when the ambulance came.

The place had been cleared, of course. There would be two passengers in the wagon, and I went to look at the dead one.

Police, supervised by the sergeant, were about to lift him. He was gaunt, emaciated, reasonably well dressed in a dark suit. The once pallid features had become quite blue, and his lean body was contorted into an arch. Wide open eyes glared horribly.

"Just as I grabbed him, sir," the sergeant said, "he got one of those things into his mouth."

He held out a cigarette case in which I saw several colorless capsules.

When the ambulance was driven off, Dr. Marley grasped my arm.

"Your friend's reviving. It'll be tricky. But he'll pull through."

And so, after a moment's reflection, I went around to Jamaican Rose's dressing room.

She was sitting on the little sofa, dressed as she had been, her fingers interlaced, staring straight ahead.

"Hullo," she said. "Will Max die?"

I shook my head.

"I hope not. Who is the man?"

"Have they got him?"

"Yes. But he's dead. Who is he?"

"Santos Doro. He followed me

here from Rio. I knew when that pellet fell on the table. He always swore he would kill me if I left him. But he was half mad. I never believed him. But, all the same, I was afraid."

"And did you ask for police protection tonight?"

"Yes. I thought he might try to kill Max."

She looked up at me. Her eyes asked, "You do believe me, don't you?" And I nodded.

"What had the pellet to do with it?"

"Santos used to roll bread pellets at the table and flick them all over the room. He was very expert. He could drop one anywhere. And so— I knew he was here. But it wasn't until this morning when it happened, that I saw he might have killed Dick— just like that. You see—" the amber eyes were raised again to mine— "I told him that I was going to England with Dick."

"But you didn't tell him you were coming back to Jamaica?"

"No. I ran away. I was very, very unhappy. And I was afraid of him."

"You loved Dick?"

Again she raised those thick lashes and looked at me, the look of a puzzled child.

"But of course. He was sweet." I took out a cigarette.

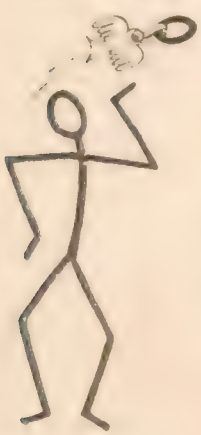
"About about Max?"

"I love Max, too. He is so gay. He makes me happy. And now, if he dies—"

"I pray that he doesn't."

"But if he does, I shall never go to Paris. And I do so long to go to Paris." Her sensitive lips quivered. "If he does die, will *you* take me to Paris?"

NEXT MONTH —



THERE WERE MANY WHO FELT THAT THE INTRODUCTION OF AMERICAN BUSINESS METHODS, EVEN AMONG THE UNGODLY, WAS ENDANGERING A VERY SPECIAL WAY OF LIFE. NOBODY GOT AROUND TO HINTING THAT CERTAIN PEOPLE SHOULD TAKE THE NEXT BOAT BACK HOME BUT FOR ONCE CLAUD EUSTACE TEAL AND SIMON TEMPLAR WERE AGREED ON THE SUBJECT OF —

THE MAN FROM ST. LOUIS

A SAINT NOVELET by LESLIE CHARTERIS

— in the February issue of THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE

the guardian

by Melville Davisson Post

THE ELDORADO of New Orleans was the worst boat. It had an evil reputation on the Ohio. The reputation, in more than one conspicuous way, was earned.

The owner was a convict, it was said, and the crew were drunken. They were recruited from the levees of New Orleans and the discarded scum of that port. "A nest of hell birds" was the usual designation of the *Eldorado.*

There was always a river war. The crew would land, commit some depredation, and go on.

But the criminal agents could not be sworn to. One could show that they had landed from the river. But the river was the border highway of Virginia.

All traveled on that highway.

The individual, careful to set up his alibi, could not be singled out as the precise agent in any particular depredation. Moreover, the loot lifted in these night raids could not be followed. It was hidden away, to be disposed of covertly in New Orleans—more than two thousand miles to the south in a world seaport of the Gulf.

It will be seen, then, how articles taken in such pillage were considered lost.

Melville Davisson Post (concededly in less Freudian-minded times) has been called one of the most important story writers America has ever had. Himself a lawyer, he not only wrote about Randolph Mason, the first great fictional criminal lawyer (in stories such as THE SHERIFF OF GULLMORE which appeared in our September issue) but also about Colonel Braxton, a great lawyer and a great gentlemen in "old Virginia, with its formal courts, its lovely ladies, and its peculiar and especial charm."

From: THE SILENT WITNESS, by Melville Davisson Post. Reprinted by arrangement with the Estate of Melville Davisson Post.

It is necessary to keep this fact in mind if one is to understand the strange events that are to follow.

On a morning of early April, Colonel Braxton, on the way to his office, was called into the local bank. When he entered, Mr. Luther Harrison, the cashier, asked him to step up to his window through which he pushed five gold pieces.

"I have been directed to hand you this money, Colonel," he said, "and to request you to come at once to Elmwood Court."

"For what purpose, Harrison?" inquired the lawyer.

"Now that," replied the banker, "I cannot tell you. But I presume it is on some professional service. I know little more than you know. A negro appeared this morning with the money and the message. He said that he came from Ridgewood Carter, and that you were to come to Elmwood Court. He seemed in a great flurry of some sort, and at once went out."

"Ridgewood Carter," echoed Colonel Braxton. "He is known to your bank, then?"

"I could hardly say known to us. He was in here on one occasion with his aged sister, some years ago, when she came North to find a residence. The old lady was arranging with our bank to meet the expenses of a niece in Miss Tucker's school, at Stanton; a monthly transfer of some funds. But the man would be known, Colonel, both by his facial resemblance to his sister and by the fact that he is lame—wounded in the Mexican War, I think his sister said."

He added: "I have heard nothing from the man. I received the message only because it was addressed to you. I assumed that it would be a matter you understood."

Colonel Braxton held the money a moment in his hand.

"This will be, then, the brother who inherits Elmwood. Old Martha Carter must be dead. Northcote wrote her will, and, now that I recall it, there *was* a brother somewhere about the world, to whom the manor house and lands were to pass. He was named, but there was nothing more about him. It was all a rather strange piece of business. Northcote had consulted privately with me and, because of certain knowledge in my possession, I had advised against the purchase when the ancient woman acquired this property. But this brother's succession to the estate must have come quickly. The old woman can be hardly in her grave."

"At any rate," said Harrison, "she was not disturbed in her life."

"But in her death," replied Colonel Braxton, "this brother may be disturbed; and if that should be his need for me then it will be of no use to go. I know the facts. No one can help him."

Mr. Harrison stepped about behind the wire screen of his counter.

"Well," he said, "I hope the young girl at Miss Tucker's school at Stanton will not be disturbed. We came to know something of her through these remittances. She is quite helpless in the world; her parents dead, her fortune squandered; dependent in every way upon this remittance from her aunt. And this remittance ceases at the woman's death.... Would there be, sir, a provision in the will to care for this dependent orphan?"

Colonel Braxton continued to balance the gold pieces in his hand. The details of a past matter seemed to recur to him.

"There was a girl in this affair —a niece, Miss Sarah Carrington. This lost brother was not the only legatee. There was a bequest to Miss Sarah Carrington, a rather queer bequest... a sort of hidden estate, one might say. But not an indefinite estate. There was an inventory, in the old lady's hand, attached to the legal testament. This inventory was quite definite in setting out the items."

"That would be the girl," replied Harrison. "And it explains a thing I saw this morning. On my way here, I passed a carriage containing your brother of the bar, Mr. Orlandus Wood, and a young girl. They were driving out on the old turnpike toward Elmwood on the river."

There was something in this incident that decided Colonel Braxton.

He put the gold pieces into his pocket and went out. He got a carriage with a negro driver. It was an April morning out of Paradise, with a soft air and a radiant sun. The sort of morning that follows a night of storm, as though to encourage the race of men that, in the violence of nature, the providence of God has not deserted them.

The storm preceding this sunny morning had indeed been violent—thunder, lightning, and rain. The sort of tropical disturbance that comes sometimes in Virginia in the early spring. But there was no longer visible evidence of it, except the wet earth, for it had been a storm of sound and rain with no breath of wind about it.

The highway ran along the elevated lands about the river.

The river lay bright and golden in the sun, with hardly a ripple on its yellow surface. There was no floating craft to be seen. Colonel Braxton marked this, and spoke to the negro driver.

"Clayborn," he said, "what became of the *Eldorado?* It should have arrived last night on its way down to New Orleans."

"She done gone on, Colonel. She come in last night, but she don't stop. She gone on. I guess she feared to stop. The sheriff done served notice on them rabscallions what he do if they stop."

And the chuckle deepened. The

ancient negro visioned to himself, with joy, the swift and violent measure with which a Virginia sheriff would enforce his threat against a river boat.

Elmwood lay a few miles below the city. A private road turned out from the highway, passed through a piece of woodland, and came into the grounds before the door.

It was an old Georgian house of crumbling red brick. The entrance door, in its decoration of Georgian architecture, faced directly east. One entered a narrow hall with a stair going up to the left, and with a door off to the right into the service portion of the house. One went from this hall into the one large room of the house, an old-time parlor.

With a care to proper furnishings this room would have been beautiful and impressive.

But it was cluttered with the odd accumulation of family pieces of various periods, and was in indifferent repair. The wood fireplace was in the center of the wall at the south end of this room, with an enclosed cupboard on each side extending from the chimney to the wall.

The room to the west, on the river side, opened on a terrace of old brick, with a view of the sloping lawn to the water. Two doors, long and narrow and fitted with small panes of glass, opened on this terrace.

Near the door was a secretary, its folded deskboard down, and on it some writing materials: sheets of foolscrap, pens newly purchased, and a pot of ink. These articles were laid out as for use.

There were three persons in this ancient room when Colonel Braxton entered: the attorney, Mr. Orlandus Wood; his client, Miss Sarah Carrington; and another—an old man sitting before this secretary. An inscrutable old man with a seamed, sun-tanned face. But behind the evidences of wind and weather, the face in its expression was a mask. It was a face emerging from varied fortunes and concealing the issue of those fortunes, like a door closed and bolted. And on the instant when he marked the man, Colonel Braxton had that disturbing impression that comes sometimes in a dream—the impression of familiarity with that face.

Somewhere, on some occasion, he had seen it.

The old man rose as Colonel Braxton came into the room. He made a stiff and somewhat obsequious genuflection, for his right leg seemed shorter than the left. There could be no doubt that he was the brother of Miss Martha Carter. The family resemblance in the face, as Harrison had said, was marked.

"It is Colonel Braxton?" he said, as though in his mind he cast about for formal language. "I have not had the honor of your acquaintance. But I have taken the liberty to ask you to come in

here. Your reputation, sir, reaching throughout the South, has also reached to me."

Colonel Braxton replied with formal courtesy.

He was intrigued and puzzled.

Here was some mysterious transaction moving toward the light.

He spoke to the attorney and to his client.

The girl sat primly on a big haircloth sofa. She was a daughter of the South in her golden youth; quite young and all in black except for the little bands of white at her throat and wrists. There was about her the trust and embarrassment of youth; that fairy idea of the world—false and dangerous—with which the cultured home, so impractically, equips its children.

And when the protection of the birth-roof fails, these innocents are slaughtered. They have no experience to protect them against the realities of life.

It saddened Colonel Braxton's heart.

How many times he had met with this! And, alas, usually too late!

The widow, trusting to her husband's associates in business, was picked bare; the child, going to its father's friends, was looted. And yet sometimes mysteriously the providence of God thrust in its hand!

Colonel Braxton looked about the room.

The violences of the thing that had occurred were open to the eye. There was no need for Mr. Ridgewood Carter to indicate them with a gesture.

The doors leading in from the terrace had been broken open. Mud-smeared feet had tracked up the floors. The closet on the east side of the fireplace at the end of the long room had been cut open as with an ax. The implement lay there on the floor, a heavy hatchet, new and sharp, with a short handle; a tool manufactured at Pittsburgh, to be wielded with one hand. And instantly Colonel Braxton realized the tragedy of the thing....

But why Orlandus Wood and himself called in?

Mr. Ridgewood Carter went forward with his explanation of this disorder.

He had hurried here at his sister's death, and after the burial had taken possession of the place, as was his right under the will she left. Colonel Braxton was probably familiar with that will.

It devised the house and lands to him, and an heirloom of old plate to the distant niece, Miss Sarah Carrington.

He indicated the violated cupboard on the east side of the fireplace at the south end of the room. His sister had stored the plate in that cupboard, and had caused it to be nailed up. And so it had remained. It was a foolish thing to do. She had been advised again and again to remove it to a place

of safety. But she had refused. And it had remained in this wooden cupboard, protected only by the nailed-up door.

There was perhaps no great danger while the ancient woman lived, for the thing was secret. But at her death, when the will was published, it was known. And, like a tale of hidden treasure, it traveled fast and far and accumulated exaggeration. It would come quickly to the knowledge of the desperadoes of the river—gathering a fictitious, lurid value.

Last night, under cover of the storm, some company of brigands from a river boat, who had evidently got knowledge of the thing, had landed here, entered the house, and accomplished the robbery.

Mr. Ridgewood Carter, sleeping in a distant portion of the house, had not heard them.

The thunder and the rain were continuous. The storm fell about midnight and raged with no break in violence of noise and rain until almost dawn. It was quite certain that the man's statement was here in agreement with the fact. He knew nothing of the robbery until he came down in the morning, and then he had at once sent for Miss Sarah Carrington, her attorney, and Colonel Braxton.

Colonel Braxton felt the depression of the pit about him.

He looked at the speaker, clearly, from all evidences, stating the truth, and at Mr. Orlandus Wood.... But at the girl, silent and motionless on the horse-hair-covered sofa, he could not look. She was so helpless before this disaster, so young, so innocent, so unsuspicious of the world of men.

And, like youth, in its virginity of the morning, she failed to realize all that it must inevitably mean to lose this inheritance. There was no bitterness and no anxiety in her face, only a puzzled sweetness, as of a child that does not understand.

And suddenly, with a clear extended vision, Colonel Braxton knew who it was that he represented in this matter.

Mr. Ridgewood Carter went forward with his explanations. He seemed concerned that Colonel Braxton should see all the evidences for himself. He went out onto the lawn and along the track of the desperadoes to the river. Colonel Braxton followed, with the girl and Mr. Orlandus Wood.

It was precisely as Ridgewood Carter had described it.

The trackage of a landing party was all about the lawn and at the water's edge. An old, decayed boat, moored to the bank and held in place at its stern by a rusted chain anchored in the river, had been used as a landing place by the thieves. There was mud about the inside of the boat, as of many feet, and the rusted chain had been dragged across the rear board as by the lurch and motion of some craft pulled up against it. It was all quite clear:

The thieves, on the mission of this robbery, had pulled out from

the river, landed alongside this abandoned craft, fastened their boat to it, gone about their depredation, and, returning, embarked from this old boat, as from a sort of wharf—on their way to New Orleans with the loot.

But Colonel Braxton had now a new and urgent interest in this affair, and he considered it as he would consider a desperate case turned over to him in a court of law.

He looked sharply at every evidence.

He scrutinized minutely every detail. But he said nothing, and he gave no physical expression of this new and commanding direction that had descended on him.

It was Mr. Orlandus Wood who spoke at some length, when they had come again into the house. He sat down before the desk-board of the secretary and drew out a legal paper, newly written, on which the ink was scarcely dry; and which to complete required only the signatures of the parties.

"Colonel," he said, "you will be surprised and pleased at the ultimate issue of this affair, as I have myself been surprised and pleased. A great loss of an inheritance to Miss Sarah Carrington has, by the generosity of this gentleman, Mr. Ridgewood Carter, been turned about to the gain of an estate of something like an equal value."

He paused, and fell into a recital of the facts:

"You are cognizant of this affair; how the testatrix, the aged Martha Carter, by her will, devised this house and land to her brother here, and a quantity of plate to her distant niece, Miss Sarah Carrington. I have before me, in her hand, the items. And if those items were correct, sir, there was the value of a fortune in that plate.

"It was the accumulation of a great family in its day, imported out of England, the valued pieces of the greatest silversmiths of Europe. An inheritance, sir, not to be equaled in its kind. And not to be left dependent for its safety to the nailed-up door of a wooden closet. But the eccentric decedent so left it, and, naturally, when the rumor of it got about, the thing happened that must inevitably happen in such a case."

He made a gesture toward the broken closet and the hatchet lying against the wall, where the robbers had struck in to pry off the door.

"Now, sir" —and he went on in his legal voice— "the ordinary man of business in our selfish time would have left Miss Carrington to her loss; but not so this considerate and generous gentleman. He feels—and I can understand the pressure of that feeling—that, as this plate was in his custody and care, he is responsible to Miss Sarah Carrington for its safety. And as it is lost to her, he must make good that loss as far he is able."

He moved the legal paper before him with his hand.

"And so he has sent for Miss Sarah Carrington and her counsel, and for you, to convey to her by deed this house and lands in lieu of this plate that cannot be delivered .... I arrived before you, and I have drawn the instrument. I think, sir, you will find it in form and valid. And I shall be obliged if you will approve it, as representing Mr. Ridgewood Carter in this affair."

The reply of Colonel Braxton surprised Mr. Orlandus Wood:

"I cannot represent Mr. Ridgewood Carter."

And, putting his hand into his pocket, he took out the five gold pieces and presented them to the man.

Colonel Braxton was standing in the center of the room facing toward the river.

Mr. Wood sat at the secretary; the girl was again in her place on the haircloth sofa, directly to the right of Carter, who stood behind her with his back to the violated doors. When Colonel Braxton advanced toward him with the money he did not move, but he put out his hand that was farthest from the girl and took the gold pieces.

He murmured some expression of vague courtesy, but he did not fall into a formal speech. It was Mr. Orlandus Wood who struck into that. He turned on the lawyer in amazement:

"You cannot represent this gentleman .... Why not?"

"Because," replied Colonel Braxton, "I represent another."

"Another!" he echoed in astonishment. "What other?"

When Colonel Braxton spoke, his voice was firm, even, and decisive.

"I appear," he said, "for the guardian of Miss Sarah Carrington."

Wood flung about in his chair.

"A guardian? I did not know that she had a guardian!"

"Why, yes," replied Colonel Braxton, "Miss Sarah Carrington has a guardian, and I am here to represent him."

He came over to the table and took up the deed that Mr. Orlandus Wood had written.

"This indenture," he said, "is in form. The consideration of one dollar and love and affection is valid in the law. It has my approval, and I shall be glad to have Mr. Carter sign it. I suggest only a formal change in the body of it. It recites that the title to the plate, if recovered, or to any part thereof, so recovered, shall vest in the grantee, Mr. Ridgewood Carter."

Wood interrupted:

"You see, Colonel, this plate will be taken to New Orleans by these river thieves, for disposal there. It is Mr. Carter's intention to follow at once and see if he can recover any part of it. But he can have no right to underake that, unless the title to the plate is in him. He cannot send back thirteen hundred miles for Miss Sarah Carrington to establish her ownership in this plate. You will understand why the deed contains this provision."

Colonel Braxton made a gesture of assent.

"Yes," he said, "I undersand why the deed contains this provision .... And you are quite right, sir, in your general observation on it.

"But I will ask you to put it in a little different form, in order that this precise intent may be clear in its meaning to all men. Write it, sir, that if the plate, or any part thereof, be recovered in any jurisdiction beyond the boundaries of Virginia, the title shall so vest in Mr. Ridgewood Carter. This will accomplish the purpose that you have in mind, and it will give this deed that wholly generous aspect that Mr. Carter would have it carry on its face."

Mr. Orlandus Wood made a gesture of assent.

"If you wish the clause so written," he replied, with a judicial air, "I see no reason to deny you. There is merit in your observation; for I may add, as outside the deed, that it has been all along this gentleman's intention, as he so advised us, to return the plate to Miss Carrington, if he is fortunate to find it. But he wished to make that donation as a gift, and not as an obligation of this indenture. I may add that, in some experience of affairs, I have never known a nobler attitude to be taken by any gentleman of our time."

He paused and took up the pen.

"I will interline the deed as you suggest. It will serve, as you so wisely see, to make clear and unequivocal the generous intention that is moving Mr. Ridgewood Carter in this affair."

The man standing behind the girl did not reply, but he began to pace backward and forward behind the sofa. By reason of the slightly shorter right leg, he had acquired the habit of putting down the toe of that foot first and making the toe thus do service for the foot. The habit took up the inequality, but it gave the man's step a certain strained preciseness. His face was in reflection, and out of the corner of his eye he followed Colonel Braxton.

That attorney moved about the room while Wood interlined his deed. He went over to the cupboard and looked closely at the splintered door, and at the hatchet lying on the floor against the wall where the thieves after the breaking had thrown it down. There was nothing about this implement by which the owner could be established.

Colonel Braxton turned back and came leisurely toward the table at which the attorney wrote. He regarded the man pacing behind the sofa, and suddenly, as though a light were flashed into a darkened corner, he recalled him. He did not pause nor was there a change in a feature of his face. But on the instant he had a great upward sweep of the heart.

It was not for nothing that the Guardian of Miss Sarah Carrington had sent him here this day!

Mr. Orlandus Wood finished with his interlineation, rose, and beckoned the grantee to the chair before the table. Carter came over without a word and sat down before the secretary. He spread out the legal paper with the hand toward Colonel Braxton, and with the other dipped the pen into the ink and wrote his name.

He had come to a decision in his pace behind the sofa and he went forward, with no hesitation and no comment.

But he was not wholly at his ease.

"I trust, sir," he said, addressing Colonel Braxton, "that this deed of gift here will be agreeable to the guardian of Miss Sarah Carrington, whom you represent."

Colonel Braxton replied at once and with a gracious gesture:

"I can assure you, sir, that it is entirely in conformity to his will."

"And I hope, sir," the man continued, "that he will understand precisely my motive in this act."

And again Colonel Braxton answered:

"He will precisely understand it!"

And he began to consider what in this affair he could have overlooked. He thought that he had acted with a care beyond any human hazard, not only within the law but within the generous conceptions of all men of honor. He could see no flaw, and yet this inscrutable attorney somehow strangely disturbed him.

Mr. Orlandus Wood came forward, sat down at the table and wrote out the acknowledgment of the grantee in form and as required by the statutes of Virginia. He dried the ink with a little sand sifted over it, folded the deed and placed it in his pocket. He got up then, buttoned his frock coat, and took up his top hat from a chair.

"I believe," he said, "this matter is now concluded."

He looked toward Mr. Ridgewood Carter and extended his hand toward his client, as though with a formal courtesy he would lead her to her carriage. But Colonel Braxton stopped him.

"You are not going away without the plate?"

"The plate!" echoed Wood.

"Why, yes," replied Colonel Braxton. "Miss Carrington will wish to take the plate."

The amazed attorney swung round on his heels.

"Then you have a clue to this robbery?"

Colonel Braxton looked at the man, as in a vague wonder.

"A clue!" he said. "Why, sir, there is here the very signature of the man set down in his act. I have observed it in a hundred cases. There is no escape from it. The criminal agent leaves always his individual distinguishing mark behind him in his work. He signs it, sir, as the artist signs his picture, or the sculptor chisels his name on his monument.... We have only to look at it with a little care to read the name....

"Come with me to this broken closet."

They went with him to the far end of the room by the splintered door. Colonel Braxton took up the hatchet lying on the floor and stepped into the corner before the violated closet.

"You will observe," he said, "that the door to this closet was forced by driving the blade of this hatchet into the crack where it is hinged to the east wall of this room; precisely at the right angle which this closet door makes with this east wall. You will notice, further, that these heavy blows of the hatchet drove the blade straight and directly into this crack of the door.

"Therefore, the one wielding this implement stood directly in front of this crack in the door when he made the assault on it, and, therefore, he was standing close against this east wall of the room facing this corner where the door is hinged.... The marks of the hatchet blade, as I have said, go straight, deep, and directly into the crack of the door in this corner, and therefore they must have been made by someone who held the hatchet in the hand that was on the side of the east wall in the room.

"He must face the closet door, and to have faced it and used the other hand the blows of the hatchet would have been oblique, slanting toward this east wall, for he must have struck across the width of his body to reach the crack in the door. But the marks of the blade in the crack of this door are precisely straight into it. And, therefore, the robber struck with the hand that was on the side against the east wall. And, therefore, he struck with his left hand...and, therefore, he was left-handed!" Colonel Braxton threw down the hatchet.

"And now that we know the man," he said, "let us get the plate."

He crossed the room with long strides, passed through the broken doors and out onto the lawn.

The three persons followed him.

But when he stepped down from the brick terrace onto the sod, Mr. Ridgewood Carter stopped him. The features of his mask were tense, as though emotions strained it, and his voice when he spoke was like a thing held level by a pressure.

"You know where this plate is?"

"Yes."

"How did you discover that, sir?"

Colonel Braxton looked the man squarely in the face.

"By the simplest observation in the world," he said.

And he extended his hand toward the river. But at this moment an inexplicable thing took place: Mr. Ridgewood Carter vanished! The expression is almost accurately descriptive, for he sprang aside into the bushes and began to run south along the river to a distant forest, dodging

in and out among the trees.

Mr. Orlandus Wood cried out: "What is this?"

"This," replied Colonel Braxton, with a gesture toward the distant fugitive, "is the escape of the thief."

"The thief!" repeated the attorney.

"Precisely that," replied Colonel Braxton. "The thief."

He turned about toward the attorney and the girl. And when he went on in his explanation, his voice was low-pitched and leisurely.

"I will tell you how I know it: When I came to examine the physical evidences of this robbery, it was clear, as I have explained, that it was the work of a left-handed man. That, in fact, no other than a left-handed man could have accomplished it. That much was certain. But that was not enough. A thousand left-handed men could be assembled. The problem was to distinguish the one certain left-handed man who had done this thing. What left-handed man was it?

"Now, to determine this it was necessary to examine all other evidence with care, and when Carter took us over this trackage of the robbery to the river I noticed every detail. Presently, a conspicuous thing appeared, that you will yourself at once see when I name it. Occasionally, where the earth was soft on the lawn, and all about the mud banks of the river, I observed that a number of the footprints were more deeply indented at the toe than at the heel. In fact, where the track was not deeply pressed in, as at the river, the toe only of the footprint was visible.

"This fact would seem, at a first glance, to confirm the theory that a number of persons had accomplished the robbery, for here was an inequality of tracks. But when I looked more closely, I observed that all the tracks were roughly of the same length and width. It became clear, then, that, even with this marked difference, the whole trackage had been made by one person. This peculiarity in certain of the tracks was due to some peculiarity in the foot of that person.

"Following this idea, I presently saw that all these peculiar prints were prints of a right foot. It was therefore evident that these tracks were all made by one man, and that this man had some peculiarity of the right foot; something that caused the toe of the right foot to be more deeply indented, in a print, than the heel.

"Now, a right leg that was a trifle shorter than the other would cause this, because, to equal the stride, such a person would step with the toe first, and the weight of the body when it came on the right leg would be borne by the toe. Consequently, it was clear that this robbery and all this evidence of trackage had been done by a left-handed man who had also a short right leg."

Colonel Braxton paused, and indicated the tracks made in the soft earth where Carter had sprung aside into the bushes.

"You will see," he said, "that deep print of the toe of the right foot."

The amazement of Mr. Orlandus Wood could not be concealed.

"But the man is Martha Carter's brother!"

"He is that," continued Colonel Braxton; "but he is also something more."

He went on:

"I could not recall him when I first arrived. But when he began to pace behind the sofa, stepping only on the toe of his right foot, and when he put out his left hand to receive the gold pieces, and when he signed your deed with his left hand, I knew where I had seen him... It was in a courtroom at New Orleans, where he was sentenced to the penitentiary for a looting by his boat crew. He had been shot in the leg and captured. He stood up on his crutch, and he raised his left hand when he was being sworn in his defense. He is the convict owner of the *Eldorado*."

"But the plate!" cried the attorney. "How can you know where it is hidden?"

"Now that," replied Colonel Braxton, "was a mere matter of deduction. When I knew that Carter was the thief and that he had acted alone, I was certain that the plate would be hidden somewhere about the premises. Because, as he had no accomplice, he would keep it near him until he could, himself, take it away. I was puzzled until I began to consider why Carter took the trouble to make the old boat appear to be the landing of the robbers. And when his explanation of the abrasions on the board at the rear of this boat were so obviously false, I knew where he had concealed the plate.

"That abrasion on the board by the chain, anchoring the rear of the boat into the river, was not the lateral abrasion that the swing and lurch of a river boat landing against it would necessarily make. It was a straight, vertical abrasion, clearly made by drawing up the chain. But the boat had not been loosed from its mooring to the river bank. It had not been used for any purpose. There could be only one reason for thus drawing up the chain—obviously to conceal the stolen plate by lowering it on this chain into the river."

And now that his eyes were opened, the attorney was even more amazed.

"Colonel, Colonel," he went on, "why these indirections? Why these involved maneuvers by the man? And why, in the name of all common sense, should he make this deed?"

"Because," replied Colonel Braxton, "he did not wish a further experience in the penitentiary. He did not intend to divide with an accomplice, and so manufactured

all these evidences himself. And by this deed as you had written it, he got a title to the plate he stole. He was giving, as he knew, a doubtful value for it."

"A doubtful value for it?" repeated Mr. Orlandus Wood. "Do you call this house, these lands, of doubtful value?"

"Of doubtful value!" replied Colonel Braxton. "The title is defective. It is based on a tax deed and subject to redemption."

It was further on that Mr. Orlandus Wood remembered another thing that had given him some concern:

The plate, tied up in a sack, and sunk in the river, fastened to the boat chain, had been recovered, and the priceless pieces emptied out onto the floor of the violated room. It was a great treasure, worth a fortune. The girl hovered over it, in silence, in wonder, as before some enchantment of the fairy.

But Mr. Orlandus Wood stood up with a grave and somewhat troubled face.

"This guardian of Miss Carrington," he said. "We must make a careful report of this affair for him."

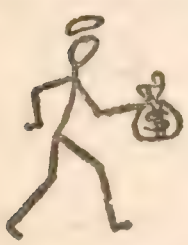
"He will know all about it," replied Colonel Braxton.

"But how could he know?" continued the lawyer. "He is not here."

"Not here!" replied Colonel Braxton in his leisurely drawl. "Do you practice before the juries of Virginia, and forget the Scriptures? . . .

"The Guardian of the Fatherless. . .not here!"

BUDGET PROBLEMS



Secret Service Chief James Rowley, reporting that his agents had seized more than Four Million Dollars in counterfeit bills this past year, compared with less than Five Hundred Thousand in 1960, complains that his undercover agents are often hesitant to start talking business with "businessmen" in the field when large sums are involved. There have been times when agents have not been able to follow up deals that have enough real money to interest these talented "businessmen" to whom they are talking. Printing techniques have improved to such an extent that counterfeiters can produce first-rate "goods" in increasingly large quantities. But the Government agents have a problem. They are allotted only Thirty Thousand Dollars a year to trap counterfeiters. That's all! And that does *not* go very far!

the dogs of foh

by . . . . . Barry Perowne

THE FOG of an autumn midnight was thickening around the street-lamps in the Chelsea district of London when Prosper Fair, ex-Duke of Devizes, and myself, Timothy Buck, one-time agent for Prosper's lost estate, Derehurst Castle, the fourth richest in the country, turned in at the dark doorway of a shuttered shop.

Prosper gave the bellpush a sequence of stabs with his forefinger. Upstairs in the living quarters of Basil Ivor, antique dealer and receiver of stolen property, a bell faintly buzzed our private signal.

"It's a pity we aren't here to do a bit of business with Basil, Timmy," Prosper said to me, as we stood waiting. "Still, perhaps he can put us on to something profitable. Heaven knows, we could do with it."

I nodded. The change in Prosper's fortunes still seemed fantastic to me. I had been at school with him. Afterward, we had kept more or less in touch, though I had gone into journalism, he into the Royal Navy. He had risen to the rank of lieutenant-commander, when, out of the blue, at the age of twenty-six, he had inherited the dukedom of Devizes, and had resigned his commission.

Barry Perowne will of course be remembered by readers of this magazine for his revival of the Raffles saga (RAFFLES AND THE ANGRY BANKER, July 1958, SMM, *RAFFLES AND THE SILVER DISH, Dec.* 1958, SMM, *etc.). Now (first publication in this country) we are introduced to another personality in the Raffles tradition, Lieutenant-Commander the Honorable Prosper Fair, the former Duke of Devizes. And now—*

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Never a chap to forget old friends, he had invited me down to Derehurst Castle for the big pheasant shoots traditional at Derehurst in October. He had offered me the job of agent for the estates, and I had grabbed it with both hands. For a couple of years we had lived a glorious life, and then, in one of the most sensational *causes celebres* since the Tichbourne affair, the claim of a cousin of Prosper's to the dukedom had been upheld in the highest court in the land, and the great days were all over for us.

The cousin, an Australian chap, very decently had offered Prosper an allowance from the estate, and also had offered to keep me on as agent. Prosper, though taking his reversal of fortune without the slightest animus—he was pretty easygoing, like most Navy men—had declined an allowance. He had urged me, though, to stay on at Derehurst, but I had thought the hell with it, and I had quit cold, resolved to string along with Prosper, come what might.

What had come, during the past year or so since our eviction from the Eden of Derehurst Castle, had been a whole series of unconventional exploits on the shady side of the law. They had enabled us to keep the wolf from the door. Except for Basil Ivor, the "fence" with whom these exploits had brought us into contact, nobody had the faintest inkling of our activities. We managed to live in pretty good style, and most people believed that Prosper was in receipt of a compensatory allowance from the Aussie duke at Derehurst.

To their credit, few people had dropped Prosper now that he no longer was His Grace, or even Lieutenant-Commander, but just plain Mr. Fair. He still was invited around a good deal, being popular for his own sake, and he usually contrived to get me invited, too. Tonight we had been dining at one of the great houses in Cheyne Walk, Chelsea. And now, as the vertical letter-slot in Basil Ivor's door opened suddenly and an eye peered out at us, the gleam of light from the slot briefly illumined Prosper's tall figure, in evening dress, with cape and opera-hat, and touched his keen, good-humoured face.

The slot shut at once, the door opened wide enough to admit us, and we stepped into an overcrowded display of furniture and curios lit by the single fluorescent tube Basil Ivor had switched on. Half the shop was in shadow. Basil Ivor, a stoop-shouldered man in his forties, wearing a quilted red dressing-gown, bolted the door and turned to us.

"Well, well," he said. "The expression on his pale, clever face was ironic. His tone was dry. "Quite a stranger, Your Grace."

"None of the 'Your Grace' stuff, Basil," Prosper said.

"Sorry," said Basil Ivor. "All right, let's go upstairs and have a drink."

He led the way toward the back of the shop, but checked suddenly, peering toward a corner in which stood a tall screen of ebony inlaid with mother-of-pearl. His bald head was cocked, as though he listened intently. I listened myself, but all I could hear was the ticking of the innumerable clocks in the shop. Then I became aware of another sound. My nerves tightened. The sound was that of regular, slightly stertorous breathing. It came from behind the screen in the corner.

Prosper signalled to us not to move. Soundless, he weaved his way through the clutter of furniture, peered warily round the edge of the screen. After a moment, he looked round, crooked a finger at Basil Ivor and myself. We closed in on him quietly.

Behind the screen, a man lay sprawled in a lacquered, ornate chair. Ivor reached out to a switch, another fluorescent tube came on. We stood looking down at the stranger. His head sagged forward and to one side on his chest. His hair was a wiry, snow-white stubble. His overcoat was threadbare, the hat on his knees was shabby. Between lax hands folded on his midriff he held a flashlamp, and he wore a black mask.

"A burglar, as large as life!" Prosper murmured. His grey eyes danced. "An old, old burglar—fallen asleep on the job!"

The aged marauder opened and closed his mouth a number of times, with a tasting sound. He stirred uneasily, disturbing the flashlamp, which fell with a slight clatter. He started.

"Eh?" he said. He raised his head slowly, blinking up at the light with faded blue, dazzled eyes black-rimmed by the mask. "Um?" he mumbled vaguely. He began to rub his eyes with the backs of his hands. He became aware of the mask. He fingered it tremulously in wonder. "What's this?" he said, dismayed.

"An appurtenance of your calling, venerable sir," Prosper said. "Allow me."

He removed the mask, held it dangling with a finger through one of the eyeholes. The marauder, who certainly was well on in his seventies and looked a bit groggy to be at this kind of caper, blinked at the dangling mask. The incriminating object seemed to rouse him to a realization of the unfortunate predicament he was in. He gave us a look of sheer misery.

"All right," he muttered. "You've got me. I'll come quietly."

"Dammit," said Basil Ivor, "I remember you. You're the old codger who came into my shop here one afternoon, about a month ago, with a Chinese jade ornament you wanted to sell. Very fine thing. Good period, good colour. It was only one of a pair, though—the Dogs of Foh."

"Yes, Mr. Ivor," the old man

said bitterly, "that was the song and dance you gave me. You said you'd have given me the moon for 'em if I'd had the pair. Because I had only the one, you shrugged and sneered over it till I was fool enough to let you have it for a fraction of its value."

"What did you expect?" said Basil Ivor. "It was stolen goods, of course."

"Be damned if it was!" said the old man, firing up. "I'd owned that Foh dog for forty years. I've never attempted to commit a robbery in my life—till now, when I was desperate enough to try this way of getting my Foh dog back. I must have been mad. I'm caught, now. I'm done for."

For a moment, I thought the poor old chap was going to break down, but Prosper put a steadying hand on his shoulder.

"Take it easy," Prosper said. "No harm's going to come to you. Here, have a cigarette." He put one between the old man's lips, held the match for him. "Now, suppose you tell us all about it?" said the ex-duke.

The old man's name was Hamish Cass. He was quite alone in the world and lived in an attic bed-sitting-room. The only thing that remained to him, from better days he had known, was his antique jade ornament. Like many another old man in his position, he had clung on stubbornly, as the years and the world piled up on him, to just one good thing, one last resource—in his case, his Dog of Foh. It had comforted him to think that, if he sank to rock bottom, he had just one good thing left to him that he could sell.

"But old men," he said, "somehow they always seem to hold on to their one good thing just too long or not quite long enough. I've seen that happen many a time. It's like a kind of fate on old people." He puffed shakily at his cigarette. "You're wondering how I managed to get in here?" he said.

He told us that he had spent the foggy afternoon reconnoitring furtively through Basil Ivor's shop window. He had seen Basil go upstairs to his tea. Just as old Hamish had been racking his brains as to how he could open the shop door without making the bell on it sound its fearful clangour, a newsboy had come hollering along with the evening papers.

"He wasn't delivering here," Hamish Cass told us. "But I bought a paper, pushed open the door, dropped the paper on the mat inside, and skipped behind this screen. Mr. Ivor heard the bell clang, of course, and he came down. He saw the paper. I hoped he'd think that the newsboy, delivering at the wrong place, had opened the door to chuck the paper in. Sure enough, Mr. Ivor just picked up the paper and went back up to his tea with it."

Basil Ivor muttered something under his breath, but Prosper

chuckled.

"Well done, Mr. Cass," he said. "Very well thought out. All you had to do then, of course, was just lie low here till Ivor locked up for the night, and all was quiet, then you could creep out of this corner with your flashlamp and start searching for your Dog of Foh. As it turned out, though, what with the long wait in this comfortable chair, and all these clocks ticking away monotonously in the darkness, you dropped off to sleep. Bad luck, Mr. Cass. Still, you know, all said and done, you did *sell* your Dog of Foh to Mr. Ivor, didn't you?"

"Too soon!" the old man said sadly. "Just about a month too soon. After all the years I'd held on to it! If I'd only known what it might have meant to me—now, when I'm old and finished—" He looked up at Prosper searchingly for a moment, then fumbled in an inner pocket and produced a letter. "I got this a few days ago," he said—"from an old friend I thought had been dead for years. Take note of the stamp."

Basil Ivor and I peered over Prosper's shoulders. Postmarked "Grasse, A.-M.," the French stamp on the envelope depicted a turreted old building set among olive groves and cypresses on the edge of a precipice that plunged sheer into a wild gorge. Prosper took out the letter, unfolded it. Written in an elderly, copperplate hand, the letter, headed by the address Chateau Mont Michel-Ange, *pres* Grasse, Alpes-Maritime, read:

My dear Hamish,

I write to you from a haven I never hoped to find in this troubled world. The building depicted on the stamp of this letter is now the property of an English married couple called Stephen and Celesta Denny, whose name is an anglicization of the French name Denis.

They run the building as a residential club for elderly Englishmen. The qualifications for admission are that one should be over seventy and quite alone in the world, should possess One Good Thing surviving from better days, and should be proposed by an existing member. It's called the One-Good-Thing Club.

After a month's probationary residence here, a new candidate, if he likes the simple kind of life we live and wants to stay permanently, is voted upon by the rest of us old buffers. If he's a clubable chap and is not blackballed—a thing I've never yet known to happen—then he simply, on election, makes a will leaving his Good Thing to Mr. Denny, who undertakes to keep it on the premises during the member's lifetime, for his own and the general enjoyment.

His Good Thing, Hamish, thus represents both the candidate's entrance fee and the purchase price of, as it were, an annuity, *which he receives in the form of expense-free keep and residence in this beautiful place for the rest*

of his days. Moreover, Hamish, instead of having parted with his One Good Thing, in an evil hour, to some sharp dealer, and so seen the last of it, it's still here *for him to take daily pleasure in as long as he lives. So he both has his cake and eats it!*

Now, old friend, a few of us have persuaded the Dennys to admit new probationary members. Our club hostess, Mrs. Celesta Denny, will be in London shortly for preliminary interviews with proposed candidates. Remembering how wretchedly you were placed last time I saw you, and hoping and praying you've not been obliged to part with your exquisite Dog of Foh, I'm proposing you.

Mrs. Denny will be available for interviews, on the 27th., 28th, and 29th. of this month, at the Finch Court Hotel. Mrs. Denny's father, I may say, was a respected contributor to journals devoted to antiquaries and the fine arts, and, though he died a poor man, he bequeathed to his daughter much of his own knowledge and love of rare and beautiful things. I feel sure she'll consider your Dog of Foh an acceptable entrance fee.

So, my dear Hamish, hoping soon to see you comfortably settled here, for your remaining years, among us old hasbeens of the One-Good-Thing Club,
I remain, always your loyal friend,
G. Douglas Gapper.

I met Prosper Fair's eyes. I read in them exactly the same thought as was in my own mind: namely, that here, in this scheme for luring to some remote mountain place abroad neglected and solitary old men who owned just one valuable thing, was as sinister and fertile a field for abuses as any we had encountered since we had returned to ordinary life from the privileged insulation we had enjoyed as the Duke of Devizes and his estate agent.

Prosper turned to Basil Ivor. "Basil, have you still got Mr. Cass's Dog of Foh?"

Ivor nodded, with a grim look at the old man in the chair. "I've got it where it belongs—in my *safe*."

"Well, go and get it out," said Mr. Fair, with the easy authority of an ex-lieutenant-commander as well as an ex-duke. "We must certainly enable Mr. Cass here to avail himself of this most unusual opportunity."

Under the great clock gleaming wanly through the fog-filled, echoing cavern of Victoria Station, on an evening a week or so later, a girl was pacing to and fro, obviously waiting for somebody. Nearby hovered a porter with a trolley bearing luggage and two packing-cases, one flat, the other square.

The girl looked about twenty-six. She was dressed with unobtrusive elegance. Her profile was clear-cut. She had pretty hair of an ash-blonde colour, and a cool,

self-possessed manner.

"What d'you make of her, Prosper?" I said.

We were standing at a window of the upstairs refreshment room, looking down at Celesta Denny as she paced to and fro under the clock.

"Let's keep an open mind for the present, Timmy," Prosper said.

I nodded. We had packed old Hamish Cass off, with his Dog of Foh, for an interview with Celesta Denny at the Finch Court Hotel. He had reported back to us that his application for probationary membership of the One-Good-Thing Club had been accepted, and that Celesta Denny, evidently practiced in such matters, was taking in hand such questions as that of his passport, his French *permis de sejour,* and the filling up of the forms necessary for permission to take out of England such personal effects as furniture and so on—up to a certain value—on declaration of intent to reside abroad. Later, he had reported again to us, at Basil Ivor's place, that Celesta Denny had instructed him to meet her under the clock here at Victoria at seven-thirty this evening, to catch the continental boat-train.

"There's Hamish, now," Prosper said suddenly.

The old fellow who had made such a pathetic hash of his attempt at burglary was alighting from a taxi which had driven in under the station arch. In his shabby overcoat and ancient hat, with his worldly goods in a hold-all and a rug-roll, he approached Celesta Denny. She gave him what looked like a warm and charming greeting, beckoned the porter to add Hamish's gear to the load on the trolley.

Pretty soon, two more old fellows arrived. We watched Celesta Denny introduce the three probationary members of the One-Good-Thing Club to each other. Perhaps because it was many a long year since they had emerged from their lonely rooms to make a journey, or found themselves in the company of a young and beautiful woman, the old man seemed to me to put their shoulders back and step out with a rejuvenated jauntiness as they went off with her toward the Golden Arrow platform.

"Right, Timmy," Prosper said. "Let's find our own seats, now."

Many of the idle and privileged class, such as we ourselves had had the qualification of belonging to for a couple of years, were bound south to escape the winter. Among them, the lovely Celesta Denny and her three threadbare companions, each old enough to be her grandfather, made an uncommon little group. They took the journey by easy stages, breaking it at Prais, Lyons and Nice. We had various glimpses of them, but it was only in the autobus going up to Grasse that we were thrown into at all close contact with them.

Celesta Denny's self-possessed air seemed to be yielding to a growing excitement, as she pointed out to the old man the blueness of the sky after the London fog, and the white houses and cypress trees on the still sun-parched hillsides. The old men, dazed by their journey and the change of scene, mopped their faces and the backs of their necks, and nodded, and tried to take it all in. Already, they seemed quite devoted to their hostess. Even old Hamish Cass—who, as arranged, gave Prosper and myself no sign of recognition—somehow conveyed to me the impression that he now disapproved of us.

It was mid-afternoon when the autobus rumbled into the little central square of Grasse.

"Soon be home, now," I heard Celesta tell the old men, encouragingly. "My husband and children will be here to meet us. Yes, *I* see them! There they are!"

In her excitement, she was first out of the autobus. From a battered station wagon parked under the trees, a small girl and a small boy scrambled out. About six and seven respectively, both brown as berries and with hair of the same blonde as Celesta's, they raced to meet her. She stooped to hug them for a moment, then straightened up to be embraced in her turn by a big, tanned, smiling chap of about thirty. Wearing sandals, a bleached-blue cotton shirt and trousers, a frayed straw sun-hat, he looked like a Provencal farmer.

I saw the three old men staring, probably not having seen much family life for many a year; then they turned their backs tactfully and began to point out to the bus driver, who had climbed on top of his vehicle, their various belongings.

Prosper was watching the Dennys out of the corner of his eye as he offered me his cigarette-case. Taking a cigarette, I muttered, "These Dennys seem perfectly okay, Prosper. I'm beginning to wonder if there really *is* a joker in this club business."

"Denny!" a voice called sharply.

Around the sun-stunned square, with its balconied houses, and its fountain playing a sparkling jet of perfumed water, were a number of *cafes* with pavement tables. This was the dead hour of the afternoon, and most were vacant. At one, however, a man in a white suit sat in a speckle of leaf-shade. He was a bulky, pink-faced, confident-looking Englishman with a striking silver lock in his well-barbered, dark hair.

As the Denny couple saw him, and he beckoned to them with the peremptory assurance of a caliph, I saw their smiles suddenly fade. Stephen Denny told the two kids to go and introduce themselves to the newly arrived old gentlemen. With an arm about Celesta's slim waist, Denny himself walked over slowly to the man in the white suit.

"Timmy," Prosper murmured, "aren't you gasping for a drink?"

I got his meaning, and we strolled over to the *cafe*. Prosper passed the Dennys, now standing by the table of the man in the white suit, without a glance, and I followed him in through the bead curtain hanging in the doorway. In the dim interior, he chose a table near the open window, in which also hung a bead curtain. And as we sat down, I distinctly heard Stephen Denny, outside, say, "I didn't know you were down from Paris, Mr. Munn."

"Arrived yesterday," said the man in the white suit. "I've an investment here to keep an eye on, in case it may have slipped your memory. But won't you sit down? Have a quick one? Ah, no—naturally—you want to get back to your new arrivals. And what have they brought with them—by way of entrance fees?"

I glanced quickly at Prosper, but he had turned to give a quiet order to the waiter who was approaching us.

Outside, Celesta Denny said, sounding a bit reluctant, "One of them has a Constable—a large study, in oils, for *Boatbuilding at Flatford Mill.*"

"Bit out-of-date," said the man in the white suit. "The French Impressionists fetch the big prices, now. Still, good enough. And the other two?"

"One has a *prie-dieu,*" Celesta said, "carved by Grinling Gibbons. The other has an antique jade—only one of a pair, but of a good period and colour. It's very fine. One of the Dogs of Foh."

"Size?" the man called Munn said sharply. And the girl must have sketched the size with her hands, for Munn said, with an edge of excitement to his voice, "Ah, indeed! Most interesting! Well, you seem to have had a good journey to London this time, Mrs. Denny. I shall look forward to seeing the new acquisitions when I come up to call on you tomorrow. Now, your old sports are beginning to glance over here a bit restlessly. So are the kids. I mustn't detain you any longer. See you tomorrow."

Through the bead curtain, I saw the Denny couple return together to the station wagon. Stephen Denny got the old men, the kids, the packing-cases and luggage loaded, and he drove off with Celesta beside him. As the station wagon turned out of the square, the bead curtain in the *cafe* doorway was swept aside and Munn came in. He looked as though he had heard pretty good news. Smoothing back his silver lock thoughtfully, smiling a slight, hard smile, he strode past us without a glance, mounted a flight of stairs.

"This place seems to be a hotel, Timmy," Prosper murmured. "There's a register on the counter over there. Let's have a look at it."

The waiter, behind the counter, asked if we wished to stay and, at Prosper's nod, turned the regis-

ter to us. There was only one entry under the date of the previous day: Bradley Munn, Jermyn Street, London, and *Galeries des Raretes*. Rue Miromesnil, Paris.

I saw the grey gleam in the ex-duke's eyes as he reached for the pen to register. There was a joker somewhere, right enough. The man in the white suit, Mr. Bradley Munn, was an antique dealer.

We watched him set out from the hotel about nine next morning, smoking an after-breakfast cigar and driving the kind of car Prosper once had had at his own disposal in the garage at Derehurst Castle. We gave Munn a bit of a start, then set out ourselves, in a tinny old car we hired locally. Prosper drove. He was bareheaded, and with his tanned face and blond hair he had that ineradicable Navy look; and he drove this car badly, never bothering to change down till the thing started knocking, but I knew this was because he had been spoiled by the power of those Derehurst Castle cars, so I didn't say anything. I was just his ex-agent, after all.

"With any luck, Timmy," he said, "we'll find this Munn joker closeted with the Dennys when we arrive. We want to contrive, if we can, to get Celesta Denny alone. I had a few cards printed before we left London that might come in useful, now." I had the map open on my knee, and he added, "Tell me where we turn off for this Chateau Mont Michel-Ange."

I nodded. North of Grasse, the country rose steeply. The side road on to which we turned wound along the beds of gorges between wooded mountainsides. The sun was hot. We saw hardly a car on this road. It was almost mid-morning when we spotted in reality the building which we first had seen as a picture on a postage stamp in Basil Ivor's shop on a foggy London midnight.

The picture had not lied. There ahead, towering high above us, against the blue sky, was the mediaeval building with its many turrets, at the brink of the precipice.

Our car made heavy going on the rough track which corkscrewed up the mountainside to the left of the gorge. This track, edged with boulders, rock-pines, occasional fig-trees and cactus-clumps, grew steeper and steeper till it led round eventually, under the hoary grey stone wall of the chateau itself, and petered out between a huge, arched doorway in the wall and a cluster of crumbling stone barns and byres. Hens fled, clucking, as Prosper pulled up; and as he switched off, I heard from somewhere nearby the grunt and slobber of contented pigs. A turkeycock inflated his wattles to take official note of our arrival, and a sunburnt, wrinkled old man appeared in a barn doorway to scratch his white whiskers at us.

"Bon jour," he said, in an unmistakably English accent.

"Good morning," said Prosper. "We'd like to see Mrs. Denny, if possible."

"Englishmen, eh?" said the old man. "Well, my name's Gapper. Mrs. Denny's got a visitor at the moment. There's his car yonder. I'll tell her you're here, though."

He pottered off through the great doorway into the Chateau. The massive doors, studded over with rusty iron, looked as though they had been standing wide open for centuries. We walked over from the car and had a look through the doorway. A stone arch led right through the building to a view of the tops of olive trees, pierced here and there by the summit of pointed, black cypresses, against the blue sky over the gorge on that side. At a table on the terrace, through there, an old man in a clerical collar and black straw hat seemed to be teaching the Denny small boy the moves in chess.

Suddenly, from a doorway to the right, under the arch, Celesta Denny appeared. She looked cool and composed in a summery dress, and Prosper said pleasantly, "Mrs. Denny, I believe? You may remember seeing us on the bus yesterday. May I give you my card?"

She accepted it, glanced at it, looked from one to the other of us with puzzled grey eyes. "Insurance investigators?" she said. "I'm afraid my husband's engaged at the moment. If you care to—"

"As a matter of fact, Mrs. Denny," Prosper said; "it's your own name we've heard spoken of in connection with certain rumours about a—a club of some kind. The One-Good-Thing Club? The name conveys anything to you?" He smiled. "I see that it does. May I, then, speak frankly? Mrs. Denny, the rumours to which I refer—rumours current in certain circles in London—might just possibly, though I think it very unlikely, have some bearing on a list I have here."

He took from his pocket a black notebook. I never had set eyes on it before. He constantly was doing this kind of thing to me.

"This is a list," he said, "of articles—*stolen* articles, I'm afraid, Mrs. Denny—which my colleague here and I are trying to trace on behalf of interested insurance companies. Rather than cause probably needless complication and embarrassment by going to the Grasse police—as, strictly, we ought to have done, of course—we preferred to come to you personally, in the first instance, and beg your co-operation in—"

"Oh, but," she said, "if you're hinting that you'd like to take a look round here, you're perfectly welcome. We're always glad to receive visitors and show them round. We don't get many up here, so far off the beaten track. We're very proud of what we

have here. I'll be delighted to show you round myself. I'm quite sure you'll find no stolen articles *here.*" She laughed. "Heavens, what an idea!"

I met Prosper's eyes for a moment. I saw he was thinking, as I was, that it was utterly impossible that such naturalness and candour as Celesta Denny's could be assumed. Talking charmingly, pointing out this and that to us, she showed us through room after room of the Chateau Mont Michel-Ange.

Each room was lofty, spacious, delightful. On the whitewashed walls hung fine pictures. Simplicity was the keynote of the place, but though there wasn't a great deal of furniture, each piece was a thing of beauty, a rare thing.

One room only she passed by without opening the door.

"It's my husband's studio," she told us. "He has a visitor in there at the moment. You can see it later, if you wish."

There were a few old men about the place. They seemed to be doing a bit of dusting. They smiled at Celesta. Their affection for her was as obvious as their affection for the things they dusted, the statuettes and portrait busts, the bowls of old *cloisonne,* the rare china and vases of delicate porcelain, the wonderful old books in the library. Never had I seen old men more obviously at home and at peace among things they revered.

"We all find some job or other for ourselves in the morning," Celesta told us.

They were, physically, an unusually healthy-looking lot of old men. I saw others, from the great windows. Small paths threaded the terraced wilderness of groves and garden patches. It all looked pretty weedy, basking there in the sunshine with the crickets chirring, but there were old fellows—one of them chatteringly attended by the Denny small girl—ambling about with trowels and secateurs in their hands.

About the whole place was an unworldly air, an air of arcadian innocence, almost of second childhood.

"My husband was nineteen," Celesta told us, "an artist living in London, quite penniless, when he inherited this place from the French branch of his family. There wasn't a stick of furniture in it then, but to Stephen—an artist—it was just heaven. He sort of camped here, with his easel, and a few old sugar-boxes for furniture. To most people, I suppose, an empty old semi-ruin miles from anywhere would have seemed a white elephant. But an old relation wrote and said that if Stephen would have him here to live out his few remaining years, he'd leave Stephen in his will a couple of rather good old pieces of furniture he owned, which would make a start toward furnishing the place in a manner worthy of it. Well, they got along

for a while, mostly on what Stephen could grow in the garden and on the few francs which the olive crop brings in. Then the old relation—Uncle John, we call him—wanted to invite an old crony of his, who was homeless, almost penniless, and quite alone in the world, to come and live here, too. Well, he came, bringing just one treasured thing he'd managed to hold on to. And *he* was rather worried about another old man, and—"

Prosper closed his notebook. "Mrs. Denny," he said, "I think I'm beginning to understand."

We were walking, now, along a kind of upstairs gallery, slanted across by sunshine from cloister arches overlooking the wild gorge, with the blue summits of the Esterels visible in the distance. To our left, the doors of small, whitewashed bedrooms stood open.

"Upstairs here," Celesta said, "things are still a bit spartan, as you see. But the picture in that room is a rather good Morland. And that one in there's an Old Crome. And this settle is a great treasure. Its panels are painted by Hieronymus Bosch."

In Derehurst Castle, there were things as fine, things of far greater value. Yet I saw that my friend Prosper Fair, ex-Duke of Devizes, was impressed, as I was myself.

"You see," Celesta said, "it dawned on Uncle John and Stephen, after a while, that if you were to bring together a lot of poor old lonely men who had only one good thing to their names—why, then, you could make a place like this a haven for them all that was *full* of beautiful things. So—the One-Good-Thing Club was born."

She smiled.

"*Something* had to be done, you see," she said. "There were half-a-dozen old men living here then, and none of them had any actual money. Poor Stephen had to work like a galley slave in the garden, and bartering produce for pigs and fowls in Grasse, just to keep the household fed. But Uncle John said that to make the place a residential club would revolutionize things. He's clever with figures, you know. He proved, by actuarial tables, that a club composed of very elderly members would be bound to lose one every now and then."

"Such is the nature of things," Prosper agreed. He glanced at me, and I knew that he was feeling as ashamed as I was at the suspicions we had had of Celesta Denny.

"Uncle John and the other old men here, the founder-members," said Celesta, "laid it down as a condition of entry that, whenever the club lost a member, the Good Thing he had brought as his entrance fee should go, by bequest, to Stephen. Then, you see, he could sell the article and use the money to keep the place going, and the gap left by the sale would be filled by the entrance fee of a newly elected member. There's not a great deal of money needed here, but there has to be *some*. And Un-

cle John proved that it was actuarially inevitable that there'd be a fairly regular income."

"He was right, of course," said Prosper.

"Well, no," Celesta said. "As a matter of fact, he was wrong."

Prosper and I exchanged a glance. "*Wrong,* Mrs. Denny?" he said, puzzled.

"Oh, yes," she said. "When I married Stephen and came here to live, the club was a going concern. But time already was beginning to bring to light something quite unforseen. Of course, we're all very grateful for it, but—Well, the simple fact is, actuarial tables just don't seem to apply here, somehow."

Again, I had an almost eerie sense of the unworldliness of this place, withdrawn from the world, on its mountain spur in the sunshine of Provence.

Celesta smiled at our expressions. "I assure you, it's quite true," she said. "The simple life, the open air, the sunshine, the companionship and light occupation the old men find here, the interests they devise for themselves, the peace and quiet, and their own treasures which they've brought here, to be shared and enjoyed by all—well, do you know," she said, "the One-Good-Thing Club has never yet lost a member!"

"But in that case," Prosper said slowly, "there's *been* no income?"

"Not a penny piece," she said. "So, to keep us all going, again something had to be done, of course. And the committee authorized Stephen to get advances on the security of some of the things here. Stephen invited a dealer and connoisseur, a Mr. Munn, who has interests both in London and Paris, but whose headquarters and home are in Paris, to come down and look round. He immediately said he was prepared to make advances, for a limited period, on various articles. He said that it would be advisable to have the advances spread over as many things as possible, so as to be fair to all members, and to keep the advance on each thing as *low* as possible. He pointed out that in that way, whenever a membership lapsed and the member's entrance fee was sold for its full value, it would be easy both to repay the advance on it and to pay off, if we chose, a bit of the advances obtained on the other things. This seemed to us all, at the time, a very wise suggestion of Mr. Munn's."

"But, Mrs. Denny," Prosper said, frowning, "if actuarial tables have continued to prove fallacious here, and *no* membership, as you tell us, has lapsed—what, then?"

Celesta looked worried. "Yes," she said, "that's just what's been—" She broke off. "Oh, here comes my husband!" She introduced us to the young farmer-artist, and explained our insurance affilations. "These gentlemen are quite satisfied, Stephen," she said, "that there aren't any stolen articles here. I've been telling them about the club

and showing them all the things."

"Have you told them," Stephen Denny said grimly, "that all the things are hopelessly in hock to Bradley Munn?"

Prosper raised an eyebrow at me. We had both seen this coming, of course.

"Celesta," Stephen said, "I'm afraid we're in bad trouble. Munn's just gone. As you know, he was examining the new things that came yesterday. He immediately offered us an advance on Mr. Cass's Dog of Foh, and brought out the usual pledge agreement for me to sign."

Celesta frowned. "Those new things can't be pledged, Stephen," she said, "till the probationary members have been here a month, decided they want to stay, and been properly elected."

"Naturally," Stephen said. "But Munn brushed all that aside, said there was no question that the newcomers would want to stay. He's been getting more and more dictatorial every time he's come down from Paris lately. The plain truth is, I'm convinced he came here today looking for some pretext to show us, once and for all, that he has the whole lot of us in his power. He decided to make an issue of the Foh dog. He said that either we pledged it to him here and now or he'd take legal steps to recover advances made on all the pledges outstanding beyond the agreed period for repayment."

"It's those outstanding pledges," Celesta said, "which have been worrying us all so much."

Stephen nodded. "Unfortunately, Uncle John, who was present, and who's always so touchy because he seems to feel he's personally responsible for the failure of the actuarial tables to run true to form here, immediately got excited and called Munn a cunning schemer and dirty blackmailer. I'm afraid it's only too true, but heaven knows we're in no position to say such things to Munn. He got pretty grim and offensive, and Uncle John was so steamed up I was really scared for the old boy. I had to tell Munn to get to hell off the premises."

"Stephen!" Celesta said, in dismay. "What in the world will Munn do now?"

"He made it very plain what he'll do," Stephen said. "He said he's returning to Paris straight away, to collect the pledge agreements out of his safe, consult his lawyer and start proceedings. We haven't a leg to stand on. He can strip this place of a large part of the things in it—getting them for a fraction of their value, because he foxed us into spreading the advances widely over the things and keeping the advances to a minimum. He wove a web for us, and, with a bit of help from an actuarial fallacy, he's got us nicely tangled in it. This place'll become, very nearly, an empty old barn again. *We* can survive it, you and me the two kids. We're young. But all our old men, Celesta—you know what the things here mean

to them—"

Prosper took out his cigarette-case thoughtfully.

Downstairs, a gong began to sound. Its musical clamour swelled through the old Chateau and out over the terraced groves. The Dennys, troubled though they were, invited us to lunch with the club members, at the great refectory table in the dining-room; but in the circumstances, Prosper tactfully declined.

As the Dennys were seeing us out, however, he suddenly patted all his pockets and discovered he had left his black notebook on the still of the cloister gallery upstairs. He excused himself and with long strides went back in to get it, leaving me standing under the arch of the outer doors with the depressed young owners of the Chateau Mont Michel-Ange.

When the ex-duke rejoined us, he and I took our leave. Neither of us had anything to say as our tinny car rattled down the track to where it joined the road winding through the depths of the gorge. Prosper pulled up here and, turning in our seats, we looked back up at the towering precipice crowned by the turreted Chateau which was the home of the old men of the One-Good-Thing Club. Basking up there in the afternoon sunshine, among its olives and cypresses, it looked very peaceful.

"Dammit," I said, "I wish we'd never came here. It sickens me to think that a sharp dealer like Munn has manoeuvered himself into a position to loot that place as he pleases."

"That depends, Timmy," Prosper said. "It depends entirely on the pledge agreements in Munn's safe in Paris. If by any chance he couldn't produce those agreements, he could hardly start legal proceedings."

I looked at him sharply. "Now, wait a minute," I said. "We've had one or two touches of luck in the year or so since we were slung out of Derehurst Castle, and I suppose most people—if they knew the truth about us—would call us crooks. All right, let 'em. We've got to live, like anybody else, and we've been living on a sort of handiness and quick-wittedness and tactical sense you picked up in the Navy. But don't get any ideas about *noblesse oblige*, just because you were a duke for a couple of years. It'd be madness to try to crack a safe, even if we were in London and could go to Basil Ivor for the equipment we'd need to make the attempt."

He smiled. "That's all right, Timmy," he said. "We've something better than equipment. We've got the key to the safe."

"Key?" I said, staring. "What key?"

"Why d'you think I nipped back into the Chateau at the last moment?" he said. "To get my black notebook? Nonsense, old boy. I knew where Stephen's studio was, because Celesta pointed it out to us, remember? I know that the entrance fees of the three new pro-

bationary members were probably in there. I knew that all the old men would be at lunch in the dining-room. So I took what I wanted, and left a note for Stephen—unsigned—saying that if he'd just keep his mouth shut for three days about what was missing, he'd hear something to all their advantages regarding the Munn situation. I think he's desperate enough to take the gamble, keep his mouth shut and his fingers crossed, and wait on events. After all, placed as they are, what have they got to lose by it?" He chuckled. "Here it is," he said—"the key to Munn's safe in Paris."

He took something from his pocket. He held out to me, on his palm, an ornament of flawless jade, intricately carved in the likeness of a reclining dog with head fiercely lifted, hackles bristling, teeth bared in a strange, oriental conception of the face of a demon hound.

"The Dog of Foh," said Prosper Fair.

I could get no more out of him. Navy officers and Dukes know the loneliness of command and, though he was plain Mr. Fair now, he had a bit of both in him. He kept his own council, and who was I to argue the toss? I was just the ex-agent of his ex-estates.

We reached Paris next afternoon by the same train as Bradley Munn, the antiques genius. We followed him from the station closely enough to hear the address he gave to a taxi-driver outside.

"An address in Saint Cloud," Prosper said, as we watched the taxi drive swiftly out of the station gates straight into a traffic jam, with the *gendarmes'* whistles shrilling and their white batons gesticulating. "Saint Cloud's where his home is, evidently. He's tired and grimy, and he's going straight home, rather than to his business premises, this late in the afternoon. Nothing could suit our book better, Timmy. It's long odds his safe is at his business premises, the *Galeries des Raretes,* in the Rue Miromesnil." He glanced up at the station clock. "Just gone half-past four. That gives us none too much time. We'll check our bags in the *Consigne* at the station here, then take a cab to the Rue Miromesnil and get things squared away."

There were dun autumnal clouds over Paris, a dismal contrast to the blue sky of Provence, and a thin drizzle of rain was falling. Already, as a breakneck taxi hurtled us through the wet streets, the lights were beginning to shine out in the fading afternoon, and the *cafes* grow animated.

Prosper paid off the taxi at the corner of the Rue Miromesnil. It was a quiet street of dignified grey houses and a few shops, mostly those of sellers of rare books and of high-grade antiques. We strolled along the street and, about halfway along on the left, spotted the *Galeries des Raretes.* We glanced in through the window at

the artistically arranged wares as we walked by casually.

"Two male assistants," Prosper said. "Probably getting impatient for closing time, which must be very soon, now." He turned up his coat collar, pulled his hat lower over his eyes. "All right, Timmy, wait for me on the corner ahead there. I'll be about ten minutes, I expect. I'm going into the shop to ask if they'd like to buy the Dog of Foh."

I waited on the street corner in the drizzle, wondering what his game was. Presently, I saw one of the assistants come out of the shop, buttoning his coat, and walk away in the opposite direction. A few minutes later, Prosper's tall figure emerged.

"All tee'd up, Timmy," he said, as he rejoined me. "As I guessed, the head assistant wasn't empowered, in Bradley Munn's absence, to make an offer for an article of such value as the Dog of Foh. I was talking French with an Italian accent, putting in a *prego* here and there. I explained that I was leaving for Rome tonight by the late train. The head assistant telephoned Munn's home, to find out if by any chance he was back from Grasse yet. Saint Cloud's a good way out. At this rush hour, everyone going home from work, lots of traffic blocks, I knew Munn couldn't yet have made it. But his housekeeper told the assistant she'd had a wire from Munn, saying he *would* be home this evening, and the assistant asked me if there was anywhere I could be got in touch with before I left for Rome tonight."

My throat felt dry.

"I gave an Italian name," Prosper said, "and the name of a hotel near the Gare de Lyon. I told them I'd be dining at the hotel at about eight, before catching my train. The head assistant decided to send Munn a note, describing the Foh dog and telling him where it could be inspected at about eight tonight, if he was interested. The head assistant told his junior to knock off work, take the note out to Munn's house, then go on home. While the note was being written, and the junior given his instructions, I wandered round idly, pretending to look at the stuff in the shop. Really, I was looking to see if there was a burglar-alarm system."

He chuckled.

"There was an alarm system, all right, but none too efficient a one, and you can't help learning a thing or two in the Navy from engine-room artificers and electricians. I think I've queered the circuit in such a way that the head assistant won't realize anything's wrong when he locks up presently, sets the alarm, and goes home." He glanced at the watch on his wrist. "He's probably just starting to lock up, now. We've time to find a place where we can buy a couple of flashlamps, then we'll get back to the shop."

The drizzle still was falling, and the shop was in darkness, with

metal shutters locked down over the windows in Paris side-street style, when we returned there. I was thankful that the Rue Miromesnil was a quiet street, with few people about now, as I kept watch, covering my ex-ducal employer in the doorway behind me, while he used his Navy skills on the lock. He made short work of it, and there wasn't a peep out of the burglar-alarm system as we slipped into the dark shop and Prosper relocked the door. The inch of light from his flashlamp slid round swiftly over polished furniture, glittered in the crystals of pendant chandeliers, was reflected in the dark depths of mirrors and pier-glasses. As at Basil Ivor's place, in London, there were a good many clocks ticking.

"Right, Timmy," Prosper said. "Now, let's find that safe."

We found it in a thickly-carpeted, beautifully furnished room at the head of a short flight of stairs at the back of the shop. The room obviously was Munn's private office. Prosper shone his torch-ray over the big desk, the curtained windows behind it—doubtless with metal shutters up outside—and the big, square safe which stood against one wall. He examined the safe.

"It'd take all night and a lot of equipment to open that—if it weren't for the Dog of Foh," he said. "Well, now—let's see." Again, he shone his flashlamp around the office. "Timmy, what's behind that screen there?"

I shone my own flashlamp behind the screen. "Just a hat-rack," I said.

"Very good," he said. "Now, where does *this* door lead, I wonder, in the corner opposite the screen?" He opened the door, shone his light in there. "Munn's personal washbasin and so forth," he said. "Good, solid door. Key on the inside—of course." He removed the key, pocketed it. "No window, just a small yentilator high up. Right. Timmy, nip down into the shop, see if you can find a ball of good, strong string. There's bound to be one there—in a shop."

Using my flashlamp, I quickly found what he wanted and brought it to him.

"Good," he said. "Now, just pull up the edge of the carpet there, roll it back about a yard."

While I obeyed, needing to concertina the screen slightly in order to do it, he busied himself in the washroom. Emerging, he closed the door, with the string coming out under it. He unwound the string across the underfelt of the carpet, then kicked the carpet back into place, covering the string.

"Join me here behind the screen, Timmy," he said. "It's a cedarwood screen, you notice, with a fretted patterning in the panels that we can see through very well. Couldn't be better." He adjusted the screen to cover us. In his right hand, he held the ball of string. The string came up

tautly from under the carpet-edge and under the arch of his left foot. "Here we are, Timmy," he said. "Squared away. Lights out, old boy. It won't be long, now, before the Dog of Foh opens the safe for us."

"I don't get it," I muttered, in the darkness. "I hope you know what you're doing."

"Sometimes I do," he said dryly. "Timmy, why d'you think Munn got so excited when he heard what Hamish Cass had brought as his entrance fee to the One-Good-Thing Club? Why did he instantly want to know the size of the Dog of Foh? Why, having examined it, did he make such an issue of Stephen Denny immediately pledging it to him?"

The answer stared me in the face. I could have kicked myself for not having seen it before. "He owns the pair to it," I said—"the other Dog of Foh!"

"I feel certain of it," Prosper said. "With his stranglehold on the One-Good-Thing Club, he's in a particularly favoured position for finding pairs to things turning up every now and then. Right. If he owns the other Foh dog, where does he probably keep it?"

"Same place as Basil Ivor kept his," I said—"in his safe."

"And when he gets his assistant's note," said Prosper, "telling him a man's come into the shop and offered a jade Dog of Foh, and describing its period, size and colour, what d'you think Munn will do? He's every reason to believe that one of the pair is in a Chateau hundreds of miles away in Provence, and that the other is —*or ought to be*—snug in his own safe. What'll he do, then, when he gets his assistant's note? I think it's nearly a cert that he'll leg it for his shop here to make certain, before he goes to meet this Italian fellow, that his own Dog of Foh *is* still snug in his safe. Wouldn't you? Don't answer," Prosper added quickly. "Here he comes now, by the sound of it."

Through the dark shop sounded the sudden slam and rattle of the street door. Footsteps approached, striding across the parquetry floor of the shop, and came up the short flight of stairs. The office door was thrown open, the lights flashed on. Peering through the intricate patterning of the screen-panels, I saw Munn throw his black homburg on to the desk. His silver lock gleamed in his well-barbered, dark hair. His plump, pink face looked anxious, and his hands were unsteady, as he took a key-ring from his pocket. He dropped on one knee before the safe. His back was to us. I saw the movement of his right shoulder as he depressed the safe-lever, pulled open the massive door. Simultaneously, Prosper, beside me, pulled strongly upward on the string he held.

From the washroom came a familiar, homely sound—the slight rattle of a chain, followed by a

sudden, brief gush of water.

Even I, though I realized instantly that Prosper must have tied the other end of the string to the handle of the cistern-chain, could have sworn there was someone in the washroom.

Upon Bradley Munn the effect was electrifying. The humble sound startled him out of his wits. He sprang to his feet, glaring at the washroom door. The cistern gurgled in there, refilling. He snatched up a heavy silver candlestick from his desk.

"Come out!" he said harshly. "I order you to come out!"

The cistern gurgled enigmatically. He strode to the washroom door, gave the handle a yank, evidently expecting the door to be locked. He staggered back slightly when it flew open in his hand. Recovering himself, he peered in warily, the candlestick clubbed. And Prosper, slipping out from behind the screen, came up silently behind Munn, knocked his candlestick from his hand, gave him a light push that bundled him into the washroom, closed the door on him, whipped out the key, put it in the keyhole, locked the door.

The ex-duke turned to me with a wicked grin.

"He'll start shouting and romping when he's caught his breath," he said. "It's a good, stout door, though, and he'll be lucky if he's heard, right at the back of the shop here. I don't think he'll get out of there before his assistants find him in the morning. But at least we know he has something to sit on all night."

He added, "Take a rub round with your handkerchief, Timmy —everything we've touched. Hurry, old boy. With any luck, we can catch the night-boat train to Dover."

He turned to the open safe.

I didn't begin to feel easy in my mind till we reached England and were through the Customs. On the evening of our return, fog was deep around the streetlamps in the Chelsea district when we called on Basil Ivor. We had a drink with him in his sitting-room over the shop, and Prosper told him about the One-Good-Thing Club.

"Now that we have the pledge agreements signed by Stephen Denny," Prosper said, "Munn's teeth are drawn, of course. But as actuarial tables *do* begin to assert their inevitable authority, and memberships lapse from time to time in the club, so that Stephen can sell the relevant entrance fees for their full market value, I expect he'll wish to pay off Munn's advances, with reasonable interest. I'll be writing Stephen a letter shortly, cautious but advisory, and of course signed by the phoney name I had printed on the 'insurance investigator' card."

"And what does old Hamish Cass produce by way of entrance fee, now?" I said.

"Hard cash, Timmy," Prosper

said. "A good lump of it. The club needs it. And Basil Ivor here is going to provide it."

"Me?" Ivor said, staring.

"Certainly," said Prosper.

He put a hand into each of his jacket-pockets and drew out, and placed side by side upon the table, the Dogs of Foh.

I saw Ivor's bald head turn slowly brick-red as he stared at them. I saw the gleam in his eyes. "The pair!" he said.

"You said you'd give the moon for the pair," Prosper said. "We'll let you off lighter than that—but not much. There were one or two other good things in Munn's safe, but as regards those, we really will let you off lightly, as they're merely on Timmy's and my own personal account."

As his ex-man of estate business in his Derehurst Castle days, I didn't much fancy that casual way of shrugging off our personal accounts. It was altogether too naval, too ducal, and he was neither, now. He was just plain Mr. Fair.

He glanced at us thoughtfully as he took out his cigarette-case.

"As to the old would-be burglar who fell asleep on the job here, I think we can take it he's now comfortably settled, for his remaining years, in the kind of place it's to be hoped all people find somewhere, when they're old and alone," said Mr. Fair—"a friendly place, in the sun."

SECRET AGENCY TIGHTENS OWN SECURITY

Two employees of this country's secret code-breaking agency defected to Russia in 1960, causing understandable concern in Congress, the House Committee on Un-American Activities bluntly stating that it was "amazed and shocked" at the absence, in the agency, of security measures which could have prevented this happening. The fact that these men were actually not in sensitive positions did not alter the reality that fellow workers of the men knew that both were (to again quote the Committee) "agnostics who were critical of the United States and complimentary of the Soviet way of life." Their co-workers, it turned out later, knew this; the National Security Agency did not.

The Committee's report, some months back, on the National Security Agency, wound up a two-year committee investigation following the defection of the two code clerks. Among the twenty-two steps taken by the National Security Agency as a result of the committee's investigation were the removal of more than twenty employees who it was felt were poor security risks; the forced resignations of two officials in the Agency and their aids; the introduction of psychological screening as a part of pre-employment examinations; the barring of new workers from sensitive code breaking information unless they have full field clearance; and the making available to security investigators of lie detector results of job interviews.

ouija board

by . . . . . Robert Andrea

"YOU DO want to know who the murderer is, don't you, Inspector?" Mrs. Krantz asked.

"Of course I do," Inspector Podd answered, looking grimly at the small, thin, gray-haired old woman whose home had been host to death. "But," he added quickly, "I simply can't accept your offer of help. The department would raise the devil if they heard about it."

"Nonsense," Mrs. Krantz said firmly. "They'd probably promote you for solving the crime."

Inspector Podd sighed. He was a tall, well-built man with an oblong face that was decorated by a thick, black mustache. "I assure you, Mrs. Krantz," he said to the widow, "that I am quite capable of solving this murder without the aid of any hocus-pocus."

Mrs. Krantz turned her head and faded blue eyes from the Inspector to the police sergeant who was standing next to him. He was a young man, blond-haired and ruddy-complexioned. "How about *you?*" she asked. "Are *you* willing to use the ouija board?"

The sergeant turned pink and frowned. "I'm afraid my sentiments are with the Inspector, ma'am," he answered politely.

Mrs. Krantz got up from her easy chair. "That's the trouble with the police department," she

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Robert Andrea, although a native New Yorker, has lived and worked in Japan, in Honolulu, and in the South of this country. Mr. Andrea, a previous contributor to this magazine, here describes one way in which — perhaps — one may catch a murderer. Does the method make sense?

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grumbled. "They're afraid of anything that's different."

In the far corner of the room, two men and a woman were seated on a bright maroon sofa. One of the men, the smaller of the two, said, "Why don't you give it a go, Inspector? Just to please Mrs. Krantz, I mean. There's nothing that says you have to accept the answers you get."

Inspector Podd scowled.

The woman seated on the sofa, an olive-skinned brunette who looked about twenty-five, said, "I agree, Inspector. The least you can do is give Mrs. Krantz' idea a try...."

The Inspector scowled again. "And how about you, Mr. Stedgrow?" he asked, talking to the taller of the two men sitting on the sofa. "Don't you have any opinion to offer?"

Stedgrow shrugged his wide shoulders. "You're running the show, Inspector. Whatever you decide is okay with me."

The Inspector glanced at the sergeant. He took a cigar out of his jacket pocket and carefully tore the cellophane off. "All right," he said, putting the cigar in his mouth, "I guess it won't do any harm to follow through on Mrs. Krantz' suggestion."

He lit up the cigar and went on, "I want it clearly understood, though, that nothing that comes of this—this little...er...experiment...will go down on the record. Has everyone got that straight?"

Mrs. Krantz smiled graciously, happy with her victory. "Of course, Inspector. We understand perfectly."

"Well, let's get on with it, then," Inspector Podd said. He turned to the three suspects sitting on the sofa. "You're sure that none of you objects to this?"

The three people on the sofa muttered their approval again.

Mrs. Krantz went to a bureau in her bedroom and pulled out a very exquisite ouija board. She brought it back to the living room and laid it down on a low, rectangular mahogany table. With the help of the Inspector and the sergeant, she pulled the table in front of her easy chair and then placed a foot-rest on the other side of it.

"All set, Inspector," she said. "You've done this before, haven't you?"

The Inspector took a long puff on his cigar and said, "Only in my youth, Mrs. Krantz. Only in my youth."

"If you'll sit down on the footstool across from me," Mrs. Krantz said to the Inspector, "I think we'll both be quite comfortable."

Inspector Podd sat down on the footstool. "I still think this is ridiculous," he murmured, but with less conviction than his previous protests.

Mrs. Krantz placed a small, thin piece of plywood on top of the board. It had three rounded

pegs underneath it, and was shaped like a heart. The top was painted over the stars, the quarter moon, and the head of a gentleman who looked like an Indian fakir. In the middle was a small hole, not quite round, though, for at one end of it a tiny arrow stuck out.

"Please place your fingertips on the planchette," Mrs. Krantz said, doing precisely that herself.

The Inspector reluctantly put his hands on the thin piece of plywood.

"Not so heavy!" Mrs. Krantz cried. "Just let your fingertips float on the surface."

Inspector Podd lightened the weight of his fingers on the indicator.

"Now we're ready," Mrs. Krantz said, looking like a little girl at her first circus. "What question shall we ask, Inspector?"

The Inspector said, "You had four guests here this weekend, Mrs. Krantz. Right?"

"Yes, that's correct."

"One of them, George Grayson, was killed in his bedroom less than three hours ago," the Inspector said. "He was strangled to death, the medical examiner tells us. There were four people in the house at the time of the murder, Mrs. Krantz: You, Miss Barclay, Mr. Towne, and Mr. Stedgrow." Inspector Podd looked over at the three sitting on the sofa. "I think the first question, perhaps the only question, we should ask this—this *thing*, is *who* committed the murder."

"A brilliant question, Inspector," Mrs. Krantz said, chuckling slightly. She looked at the board and straightened her expression into one of intense concentration. "Ouija board," she asked solemnly, "who killed George Grayson?"

For a few moments, nothing happened. Then, suddenly, the planchette began to move. It moved in short jerks, carrying along with it the fingertips of Inspector Podd and Mrs. Krantz as it progressed toward the alphabet at the top of the board.

The first letter it stopped at was "S." The two men and the brunette woman who had been sitting on the sofa had come over near the board to watch.

Next the indicator jerked its way a space over to the "T."

Everyone looked at Stedgrow. He turned red and ran his fingers nervously through his thin black hair.

The third letter was an "E." Stedgrow fumbled through his pockets for his cigarettes and lit one.

Next the planchette moved to the "D." Stedgrow began to perspire visibly.

After the indicator swung quickly over to the "G," Stedgrow said, "It doesn't prove a damn thing! It's just a lot of malarkey!" His voice and eyes were uneasy, though.

The Inspector took his fingers off the indicator. "I don't think

we've got to go through with this, Mrs. Krantz," he said. "It's quite obvious what name the thing is spelling out." He took his cigar out of the ashtray and relit it.

Stedgrow said, "This—er—doesn't mean anything, does it, Inspector? You said that before you began, didn't you?"

"Certainly I did, Mr. Stedgrow," the Inspector replied. "You've no cause for worry at all. Unless, of course, you are the one who killed Mr. Grayson." The Inspector looked up from his perch on the footstool at Stedgrow.

Stedgrow turned his brown eyes away.

Mrs. Krantz said, "I have an idea, Inspector. Suppose we ask the ouija exactly how we can *prove* that Mr. Stedgrow is the murderer? That ought to clean up the loose ends quite nicely."

The Inspector puffed on his cigar. Stedgrow turned slightly pale. Mrs. Krantz grinned, waiting for an answer.

"We-e-ll, all right, Mrs. Krantz," Inspector Podd finally said. "We've gone this far with the thing, so I don't suppose there's any sense in ending it prematurely."

The old woman and the Inspector both placed their fingertips on the planchette again. Mrs. Krantz asked, "Ouija, tell us how we can prove that Mr. Stedgrow is the murderer. . . ."

The indicator began to move again. It went around the board wildly for a while, then finally settled on the letter "B."

Mrs. Krantz, the Inspector, the sergeant, and the three suspects, especially Stedgrow, watched the proceedings anxiously. The next letter the indicator stopped at was a "U."

Stedgrow licked his dry lips.

The third letter was a "T."

The fourth letter was also a "T." Stedgrow began to back off from the rest of the group.

The fifth letter was an "O." The Inspector glanced over at the sergeant, then at Stedgrow. The sergeant nodded back acknowledgement.

The sixth letter was an "N."

Stedgrow made a dash for the front door. The sergeant had been anticipating his flight and was just behind him. The Inspector called, "No need to hurry off, Mr. Stedgrow. The party's not over yet."

The sergeant grabbed Stedgrow and brought him back to the rest of the group.

"Button," Inspector Podd said. "I wonder just what it is about the word that frightens you so much, Mr. Stedgrow?" The Inspector put his fingers in his watch pocket and pulled out a small white button. "We found this in the dead man's hand, Mr. Stedgrow. He must have pulled it from your shirt while you were strangling him."

The Inspector walked over to Stedgrow and pushed open his jacket. He placed the white but-

ton against Stedgrow's shirt, where there were a few loose strands of thread hanging from a spot that was missing a button."

"Perfect match, Stedgrow," Inspector Podd said, putting the button back in his watch pocket. "It's a shame you didn't notice the missing button before we got here."

The Inspector turned next to Mrs. Krantz. "I'm quite sorry to have tricked you, ma'am, but I *guided* the indicator of the ouija board to those answers. After you insisted I try it, I decided that using the board would be as easy a way as any to point the finger of guilt at Stedgrow. I'd already noticed the missing button on his shirt when I first talked to him." He paused, then added, "I do hope you'll forgive me, Mrs. Krantz."

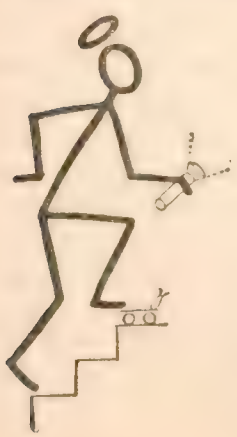
Mrs. Krantz looked crestfallen for a second, but quickly recovered. She smiled and said, "You're forgiven, Inspector. But before you go, let me ask you one question. . . ."

"Yes? What is it?"

"Don't you think it's possible that the board would have solved the murder on its own, if you hadn't helped it along?"

Inspector Podd pulled out another cigar and began to unwrap the cellophane. "Unfortunately, Mrs. Krantz," he said, "the answer to that question will never be known."

A NEW RULE AT SAN QUENTIN



A visitor to San Quentin Prison's recent art show reports that he bought some paintings there —and then tried to pay for them with a check.

The guard looked him up and down, obviously checking through a mental filing card index. The visitor became just a shade nervous; there was always the possibility that he might happen to look like someone the guard had reason to disapprove of. But then the guard explained.

"Sorry, but you'll have to pay cash. We had trouble at last year's show. We got stuck with Six Hundred Dollars worth of bum checks!"

murder is a specialty

by . . . . Fred S. Tobey

"IT ISN'T as if death was untimely for either of them," said the elderly doctor. "Mrs. Winton was ninety-four and her son was seventy-three, and they hadn't much to look forward to, the way most of us measure things."

Lieutenant Malloy switched his heavy bulk around, trying to achieve a little more comfort on the small kitchen chair.

"Tell me as much as you can, Dr. Evans," he said. "I'd like it from you before I see the brother."

The doctor, sitting across the kitchen table from Malloy, straightened his shoulders momentarily, then leaned forward on the table again as if his weary frame needed its support.

"This has been a sad family recently," he said. "The mother clung to life in spite of sickness and operations. William—that's the one who's dead—has had a bad heart for years. He was an electrical engineer and had a good job, but he had to retire at sixty because of his illness. His brother Charles, the one you'll be talking with, is partly crippled with arthritis, though he's able to get around. He used to be a bookkeeper. He's the younger of the two, but only by a little. He's seventy-one. There's hardly been enough money to keep this house going and buy food for the three of them, I

Fred S. Tobey, a newcomer in this field (while this is his first story to appear in our American edition, he has appeared elsewhere), has attracted considerable attention with his stories of the sort of people you could have met. You find yourself wondering if this isn't why they seem so familiar.

imagine, let alone pay hospital bills. It's been a long time since I've charged them for my calls."

"Do you call here often?"

"Nearly every day. I live just two houses away and I've fallen into the habit of stopping in here just to see how things are going. I was on my way home for afternoon office hours today, and stopped as usual. The front door was unlocked and I walked in as I always do, calling out as I came into the front hall. Charles came hobbling to meet me and said to come quickly to the bathroom, that William had killed his mother and was probably dead himself."

"She was electrocuted, I believe you said?"

"Yes. Charles says he came on the scene as William was dropping the mother's radio into the bathtub, at her feet. He thinks William intended it to look as if the mother had pulled the radio in herself, by accident. Charles grappled with his brother and William fell, striking his head against the tub. He was still living when I arrived, but I couldn't save him. He died while Charles was phoning the police to bring oxygen."

"You say William was dropping the radio into the tub at his mother's feet when Charles looked into the bathroom?" Lieutenant Malloy looked at the elderly doctor keenly. "So Charles says. The radio was still in the tub with her when I arrived, but the plug had been pulled. Do you want to talk to Charles now, Lieutenant?"

"I do not," said Malloy, grimly. He leaned forward to balance his bulk as he heaved it up off the inadequate chair. "You and I have a couple of things to do first. Let's go look at that bathroom."

"Mr. Winton," said Lieutenant Malloy, "I would like you to tell me about the death of your mother and your brother, just as it happened. Our stenographer will take it down."

Malloy's hulking frame made the musty living room of the Winton house seem even smaller than it was. He was walking slowly back and forth in front of a dilapidated divan on which Charles Winton and the stenographer sat. Dr. Evans and the patrolman who had brought the stenographer were seated in armchairs on the other side of the room.

"I can only tell you what I told Dr. Evans." Charles Winton was wan and disheveled, and his sparse grey hair was awry. He clasped and unclasped his stiff fingers as he spoke.

"I had drawn Mother's bath and left her to get into the tub by herself, as I always did. Mother was very modest. The most she would allow was to leave the door part way open so we could hear her call if she had any trouble.

"So I was quite shocked, as I walked by the bathroom a few minutes later, to catch a glimpse of William's back through the

partly open door. I stopped and opened the door wide, and just at that moment William was dropping the radio into the water at Mother's feet. I could see that the cord was still connected and I knew Mother would be electrocuted. I grappled with my brother and we went down together. His head hit the edge of the tub and he collapsed on the floor. I reached up and pulled the radio cord out of the wall socket, but it was too late. Mother was slumped down in the tub and seemed quite dead. Just then I heard Dr. Evans calling from the front hall and I asked him to come quickly. I thought William was dead, too, but he wasn't, then, Dr. Evans says. Dr. Evans told me to phone the police to bring oxygen, and I did, but before they could get here, William had died."

Lieutenant Malloy stopped in front of Charles Winton and held the old man's gaze with his own.

"Mr. Winton," he said evenly, after a pause, "would you tell the same story if you thought your brother had lived long enough to speak before he died?"

Charles Winton's eyes went wildly to Dr. Evans's face, but the old doctor was gazing at the rug.

"Why—why, of course," stammered Winton, his eyes coming back to those of the lieutenant, "what else—"

Malloy broke in suddenly, sharply, moving a step closer to the old man.

"You are lying, Mr. Winton," he said. "It was not your brother, but you, who dropped the radio into the water. But it didn't kill your mother, Mr. Winton. Your mother began crying out for help when she saw what you were doing, and you had to push her head under the water to stop her outcries, didn't you? That was how your brother found you when he hurried there in response to your mother's calls. He tried to stop you but you struggled with him and smashed his head against the tub and killed him, too."

Charles Winton's eyes turned again to Dr. Evans, this time accusingly.

"William talked to you before he died," he said. "Why didn't you tell me?"

Dr. Evans opened his mouth to speak, but Malloy cut him off.

"Yes, we learned the truth from William," said Malloy. "Why don't you confess now, Mr. Winton, and get it over with?"

Charles Winton's head had fallen back against the upholstery of the divan, and his face was ashen.

"All right," he murmured. "I want to tell. Now that you know anyway, I'm glad to get it off my conscience. Mother was getting worse every day. The money wasn't enough to keep us all. I thought it would be a blessing if Mother were to go quickly. I knew if her radio fell into the tub she would be electrocuted—"

"How did you know that?" cut in Malloy.

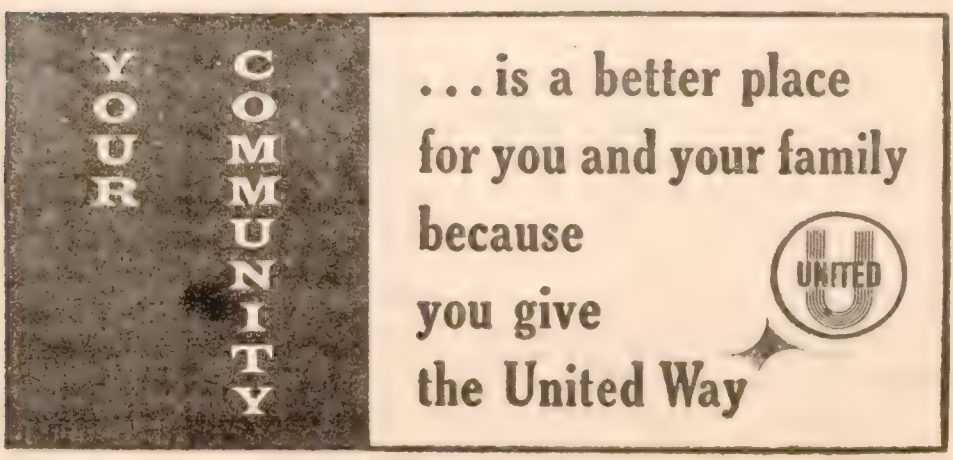
"I've read about it in stories. I thought it would seem as if she pulled it in herself while adjusting it. So when I was sure she was in the tub I went back and dropped it in the water, while it was still playing.

"For some reason the electricity didn't seem to affect Mother at all, but she began calling for William. I became panicky and pushed her head under water to stop her outcries. But William came running in and pulled me away. I didn't mean to kill him, too, but his head hit the tub and he collapsed on the floor. Then I heard Dr. Evans calling. I didn't think— I didn't suspect for a minute that William ever recovered enough to talk."

"He didn't," said Lieutenant Malloy. "Your brother never regained consciousness. I didn't say he spoke, remember, I said we 'learned the truth' from him. Your brother was an electrical engineer, Mr. Winton. He would never have tried to kill your mother by dropping a radio in the tub *at her feet,* because he would have known it wouldn't work. Water is a mighty poor conductor, and besides, the electrical path at that end of a tub with a porcelain finish would be from the radio to the drain outlet, not through your mother's body. I happen to know something about electricity, Mr. Winton, because I went to radio school in the Navy.

"So I knew you were lying, Mr. Winton, and when Dr. Evans checked your mother's lungs, at my suggestion, and found water in them, all the rest was like one, two, three. It had to be you who dropped the radio in the tub, and pushed your mother under when she cried out.

"People are always trying to horn in on somebody's else's specialty, Mr. Winton, but it doesn't work. Electricity was your brother's specialty and you should have steered clear of it. Murder is mine."



what's new in crime?

by . . . . Stefan Santesson

John Blackburn has written a superb suspense-espionage novel in THE GAUNT WOMAN (Mill-Morrow, $3.50), unique in that for once the men and the women involved are not *opera bouffe* characters, drawn tongue in cheek, but instead thoroughly credible professionals who have a job to do and attempt to cope with it—without heroics, with no illusion about the price of failure, and with no hope for the tomorrows. Peter Vanin is such a professional, a skilled professional who is sent to England from Russia to find out a secret that can help to wreck the British economy, fully aware of the reward for failure and, for that matter, for success.

Blackburn has written not just another espionage novel but a genuinely distinguished novel of its kind. Vanin—and the men who hunt Vanin—are at no time papier mache figures, they are instead decidedly believable. Vanin's superior and his opposite number in England are men for whom the Vanins of this world are expendables if the country's interests can thus be served—in marked contrast to the more romantic school of espionage novels, an example of which will be commented upon later. Even the smaller people, the informers, the sick and the hunt-

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Mr. Santesson, editor of this magazine since 1956 and former editor, between 1945 and 1952, of the Unicorn Mystery Book Club, continues his column of comment on mystery and suspense novels and on other matters.

ed—and the double agents—are all men and women whom you instinctively know *could* live in the shadows.

The knowledge, from the outset, that Peter Vanin's mission is foredoomed, does not alter the fact that John Blackburn, if I may be allowed to repeat myself, has written a superb suspense-espionage novel. THE GAUNT WOMAN is excellent! Do not miss it!

And do not miss Rex Stout's latest contribution to the Nero Wolfe saga, GAMBIT (Viking, $3.50). Matthew Blount is in jail, charged with the murder of a man it is known he had not liked. His daughter believes in her father and commissions Nero Wolfe to prove his innocence, despite her mother's objections and despite the initial opposition of her father's attorney, whom she has reason to distrust. What then happens, and what Wolfe proceeds to do, is in the tradition.

The publication of William Haggard's THE UNQUIET SLEEP (Washburn, $3.50) has coincided with the debate in this country over the need for stricter drug controls, subsequent to the thalidomide tragedy. I am tempted to say that this was unfortunate because this can obscure the reality that this is the story of a super-tranquilizer, popularly known as "the executives' friend", and of the unpleasant potentials of said tranquilizer. The clash of personalities is immediate as men for whom the pill suddenly represents a threat to their security search for an answer to the problems arising as the pill appears on the Black Market. Mr. Haggard, as usual, tells an interesting story. Do read this.

Bruce Munslow's NO SAFE ROAD (Walker, $3.50), is obviously written by a man who knows the Sinai peninsula where Johnny Conner, Rufus Hayden, and his daughter Julie, hunt the answer to Hayden's return to Egypt. It is however a disturbing book, disturbing in its handling of the people who are, their greed and their stupidity and their prejudices notwithstanding, the raw material of the transitional period in Egypt which has come close to breaking Conner as the story begins. I am afraid I did not like this book.

Michael Gilbert's THE DOORS OPEN (Walker, $3.50) is however pure delight—improbable delight, I hasten to add—as we meet Major Patrick Yeatman-Carter, without a doubt one of the most attractive idiot-heroes you've come across in some time. As for Lord Cedarbrooke, who early takes a hand in what transpires, he will only seem somewhat incredible if you've not previously been exposed to John Buchan. And—ah yes—to Dornford Yates.... There is something very pleasant, in other words, about this resolutely

non-Freudian story of these likable people coping with this rather mad conspiracy to destroy the confidence of middle-income England in the Economic Establishment. Gilbert's THE DOORS OPEN is pleasant reading. Do not miss it.

Avery Johns' TRAFFIC WITH EVIL (Doubleday, $2.95) is the story of the almost accidental kidnapping of a very charming youngster, Agnes Carlisle, who rebels against the much-too-proper-and-sheltered existence that she is expected to lead. Judge Carlisle has warned her repeatedly that she must not see this man, but Agnes Carlisle is nineteen years old and parental objections are not always listened to at that age.... The result, in this case, is TRAFFIC WITH EVIL. Pleasant!

A correspondent points out that I shouldn't have asked, last month, why Collier hasn't reprinted the early Upfield novels. "Better ask —why hasn't Dolphin" done so....

Well—why *hasn't* Dolphin reprinted the early Upfield novels?

But let me digress, and discuss a subject of interest to all of us.

Differ as we do in this country in politics, religious faith or color of skin; line up as we do as business or professional people, labor or management, we are a united people where unity counts most. And—that is in our regard for human life. . .human needs. When we get down to the bedrock of what we really believe in, we *are* one people. We believe in our fellow men as the children of God and that we are our brother's keeper. We believe in ourselves and in the power to help each other through united action.

Symbols of that belief are the recreation center, the Boys' and Girls' Clubs, the well-baby clinics, the foster homes, the centers for health, healing, research and rehabilitation that are all doing such wonderful work in our communities. These are all the good, the positive, the hopeful things we're working for, and they are not for one small group labeled "the needy," but for all of us. For, in truth, we all are "needy" at some time, in some sense. And through the United Way of working, planning and giving many learn to help each other.

Man must be thought of not as a collection of diseases or "problems" but as a whole human being, with a mighty spirit as well as a fragile body. We *must* think and plan and give *together* for a balanced program for this whole human being.

There is joy in this kind of togetherness, this kind of giving. You *can* and *will* share in this joy when you make your once-a-year generous pledge to your United Fund or Community Chest.

I strongly urge you to do so.

Lt. Larsen of Homicide West

finds himself facing two problems in Samuel A. Krasney's new Abe Larson novel, HOMICIDE CALL (Morrow, $3.50)—the problem of what to do with a Congressman whose actions need explaining but who does not hesitate to remind all concerned of what he can do if aroused.... —and the problem of identifying the bomber who has near-wrecked the new school at the housing project before still more children are to be endangered by him. The two problems seem at times to be related. Do read this.

The Gordons, the husband-wife writing team whose last novel, OPERATION TERROR, became the film EXPERIMENT IN TERROR, again tell a close-to-fascinating story in MENACE (Doubleday, $3.50). Young Sheridan Jones is kidnapped in Thailand and, within hours, we see the police in Thailand and in Hong Kong, and the police in Tokyo, working closely together, with the fantastic resources of the F.B.I. making early identification of the girl's kidnappers possible. What particularly interested me was this picture of instant and immediate collaboration—a coordinated collaboration—between the police in Thailand, where she is kidnapped, and the police in Hong Kong, where the ransom demand is finally made and measures taken to cope with the developments. Read this for police procedure—and for enjoyment! A must!

There are not too many people who've had the unenviable distinction of being killed underwater—at least not so simply.... Dermot Wilson, dilettante archeologist, had worked hard at giving most of the members of his expedition reasons enough to eliminate him. It becomes Detective Inspector Richard Left's task, in Charles Forsyte's DIVE INTO DANGER (Morrow, $2.95) to interrupt his vacation long enough to identify the man—or the woman—who has seized the opportunity of disposing of the unpleasant Mr. Wilson. He does so, admirably, surrounded by unbroken walls of cold sea water.

Mr. Anthony Boucher, referring to my review of Brad Williams' THE WELL DRESSED SKELETON (Mill-Morrow, $2.95) in our October issue, points out that writers "who have written about Mexicans as people include Ross Macdonald, William Campbell Gault, Aaron Marc Stein (frequently), Thurston Scott (one memorable novel, CURE IT WITH HONEY), and most recently Suzanne Blanc, whose Inspector Menendes is one of the best new detectives of the '60's."

E X Ferrars' THE WANDERING WIDOWS (Doubleday, $2.95) represents something of a departure for the author of ALIBI FOR A WITCH, KILL OR CURE, THE MARCH HARE MURDERS, etc. Much of the ac-

tion of this novel by one of this writer's long-time favorites takes place on the island of Mull, in the Hebrides. The men and the women caught up in the web of murder, including young Robin Nicholl who falls in love with one of the suspects, are however "foreigners" to the island, people for whom the island seems strange and so very old, something one must visit—but not live on. Nevertheless, you come away understanding the author's interest in the Hebrides—and also understanding the murderer.

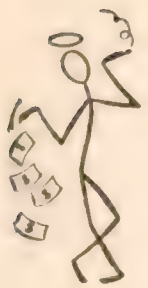
Ludovic Peters' A SNATCH OF MUSIC (Abelard-Schuman, $2.95), on the other hand, *demands* understanding. We are told by the publishers that the author has not lost "the knack of writing thrillers that thrill". This may be so. Ian Firth, admittedly, is a likable enough private detective, but the mother of the kidnapped child, whom Firth eventually does catch up with, is incredible. It is hard to believe that a woman such as this could think the way this one does, and behave the way she does. As for the reason for the wave of kidnappings, all over Europe, which Firth—with assistance from an unconvincing American detective—eventually brings to a close, this is strictly comic-opera. Sorry.

Norval Lamkin is forty years old when he realizes that it is high time that he prove, at least to himself, that he isn't really the inept, the clumsy and the apologetic man that he seems to those who know him, including his wife. Robert Bloomfield's KILL WITH KINDNESS (Doubleday, $2.95) reports in considerable detail on the change in the makeup of this man whose plans, at first, only call for one murder... Many will no doubt find the novel most interesting.

We have a real "first-first" coming up in an early issue, THE MAN IN THE BROWN HAT, a short-short by George D. Crothers, written for and first published in Angelica W. Cass' recent book, LIVE AND LEARN (Noble and Noble, New York), a book published for use with adults who are beginning to read with ease. Mrs. Cass, a good friend of this magazine, is Associate in Americanization and Adult Education, New York State Department of Education. Mr. Crothers, a TV and radio producer and a published author in another field, works closely with adult education programs and wrote, for LIVE AND LEARN, what we believe to be the first detective story written specifically for adults who cannot read well (or who have recently learned to read and for whom there is little or no reading material).

There are ten million adults in this country who lack basic elementary schooling. This story, which we will reprint in an early

issue, is intended for them—the people who, through no fault of their own, are limited by this handicap to close to visual materials. The story was written within a 600 word vocabulary for adults who are in fundamental literacy adult education classes throughout the country. I felt that it would interest many of you that an experiment such as this has been made in this field.



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ghost town

by . . . . Edward D. Hoch

BEN SNOW had been riding for half a day when he spotted the lonely sheepherder and his flock, blots of white against the gray of the valley. He spurred his horse a little faster, and saw the man look up, startled, fearful with the age-old terror. Whether gunman or cowpoke, a strange rider most often meant an enemy of sheep.

But Ben Snow was hardly interested in the bleating creatures that now ran from his path. Night was fast approaching over the eastern hills, and he would be needing a camp for the resting hours. "How far to the next town?" he called out to the sheepman.

The man on the ground, a pale youth still in his early twenties, eyed Ben uncertainly. "Raindeer's just over the next hill," he said finally. After a moment he added, "But you don't want to go there."

"Why not?" A night in a hotel was better than one under the cold stars anytime.

"Raindeer's a ghost town."

"That doesn't bother me. Sometimes I like to be alone."

"You don't understand, mister," the sheepman said slowly, as if addressing some St. Louis dandy. "It's a ghost town with a ghost. It's haunted. No one goes to Raindeer any more. . . ."

You are very lonely when men fear you — or think they fear you. Ben Snow, as we have seen in earlier stories about him (THE FLYING MAN, in the July 1962 issue, FRONTIER STREET, in the March 1962 SMM) has had reason to realize this as man after man has faced him, fearing him.

Ben smiled down at the man. "Well, I guess I can risk a ghost for one night. Thanks a lot." Then his horse was under motion again, scattering sheep before it.

The wind was turning colder as he rode. It was the hour of dusk, a dismal one on the plains at any time, but especially bleak this night when he rode alone. It wasn't as if he was riding toward anything—that would not have been so bad. But he was riding away from something. He'd been riding away from something for nearly a year now, for as long as he could remember.

Over the next hill.

Yes, the sheepman had spoken the truth. A town stretched out before him, a town of shacks with only a semblance of a street. It might have been a deserted mining town, except that there were no mines within a hundred miles. As he rode down along the dusty trail he passed a weather-beaten sign that might have been standing for a century:

WELCOME TO

RAINDEER

The Town That

The last words, whatever they were, had long ago faded and rotted away. There was a date, too, that looked like 1866. Perhaps the town had been born in that first brave year after the War, when men still thought the worst was behind them.

Ben Snow hardly remembered the end of the War. He'd been barely alive at its beginning. A book about it, *The Red Badge of Courage,* had just been published back east, and Ben had found a copy that had drifted into Sante Fe somehow. He could have been a young man then, and perhaps he wouldn't have acted much differently from the young man in the book. He didn't know. Instead, he'd been born a generation later, two thousand miles further west, in a country where men were only now beginning to hang up their guns.

Welcome to Raindeer....

Ghost town in a valley that time had passed over.

He tied his horse to a wobbly hitching post and went into one of the darkened buildings, searching for a lamp. There was nothing but dust and sand and sagebrush. And memories. The big mirror and the place where the bar had stood (for this had been a saloon). Bars were valuable west of Texas, and they were often moved from one place to another.

He wondered where the name of Raindeer had come from.

"Stand right there, mister."

Ben turned around slowly, his hands carefully away from his sides, and looked into the barrel of a rifle. That didn't surprise him half as much as the person who held it—a dirty-faced girl with a

kerchief wrapped around her head, wearing a sweat stained blouse and tight jeans. She was standing in the doorway, caught in the fading dusk, and she must have had eyes like a bat to see him in the darkness.

"I was told the town was haunted," he said, taking a step forward.

Without changing her expression she fired a bullet into the wall a close two feet to his left. "I said to stand still."

"I heard you. Be careful with that thing."

There were riders outside now. Two, no three, and they'd been riding hard. She didn't seem surprised to hear them. "Come on in," she called out. "We have a visitor."

They had lamps and these were quickly lit, bathing the scene in a sort of red glow. And by this light Ben first saw them: the Indian, horribly handsome in a way only Indians can be, wearing white man's clothing but carrying a knife instead of a gun on his belt; the Beard, a foul-mouthed old man who constantly chuckled to himself, who wore his gun down on the hip and chewed tobacco; and lastly the Preacher, whose gun was almost hidden by his black suit. Almost but not quite.

It was the Preacher who spoke first, and he spoke as their leader. "Toss your gun over here, mister, and she'll put down the gun."

Ben shrugged and unstrapped his belt. "I was only looking for a place to spend the night," he said. "I thought this town was deserted."

"It is deserted, mister," the Preacher replied. "We're only spending the night too. Who are you?"

"My name is Ben Snow."

The name meant something to the Beard. His hand went for his gun in a flash, until he remembered that Ben was unarmed. But even then he kept it resting on the butt. "That's Billy the Kid," he croaked.

The Preacher frowned. "Billy the Kid's been dead a long time."

"I'm glad you agree," Ben said. "I've been trying to convince people for years."

"Don't let him fool you!" the Beard said. "I saw him kill a man back in '90."

"Is that right, Snow?"

"I've killed a few men. Who hasn't?"

"I haven't," the Preacher said. "But that's beside the point. We're going to have to tie you up and leave you. Can't take a chance of your causing trouble."

"What kind of trouble?"

But the black-suited man ignored him. "Girl—tie him up. Good and tight."

She set down her rifle and came toward Ben. "It'll be a pleasure."

"I'll take a look around," the Beard said. "He might have friends." The Indian followed him out, and the girl came around Ben to start her work. At that moment

there wasn't a gun on him, but he had a feeling the Preacher could be awfully fast on the draw, even with that coat on.

The girl pulled his arms roughly behind his back and tied the wrists with rawhide while the black-suited man watched. Then she tied his legs at the knees and ankles and toppled him over on his side. "I'm sure you'll stay there," she said. The Preacher nodded and went out to join the others at the horses.

"You must have some name besides Girl," Ben said, now that they were alone.

"Laura. Does my name interest you?"

"You interest me." His eyes were on the tight jeans, worn at the buttocks from heavy riding. "How'd you get mixed up with those three?"

"Harry's my brother."

"The one in the black suit?"

"Of course! It wouldn't be the other two creeps, for God's sake! That bearded one, Jason, gives me the creeps. And the Indian's not much better. Where my brother dug them up, I'll never know."

The bearded Jason returned at that moment, and walked over to Ben. "You damn killer! Your fast draw don't help you now, does it?" He aimed a kick at Ben's ribs, but Laura stopped him, blocking it with her foot.

"Lay off, Jason. Get lost."

"Damn tramp! Gettin' ready to sleep with him already?"

She slapped him across his bearded cheek and he went away mumbling. "It's like that all the time," she told Ben, not seeming too upset.

"What are the four of you up to?"

She shrugged, too innocently. "Just riding. Tell me about you, Ben Snow. He said you were Billy the Kid."

He rolled over on the floor, trying to get comfortable. "A lot of people say that. Doesn't make it true, though. Billy Bonney was born in '59 and killed in '81. I wasn't born till '61 and I'm still around, a mighty live 34 years aged."

"Then why do they say it?"

"Too many rumors that Billy lived after '81. I guess the people wanted him to be alive or something. Hero worship, you know. I was fast with a gun and the story got started. It was one jump ahead of me all across the southwest in '90, and it's still around now. I've had five years of living down a legend, and I've killed some men trying to do it. Trouble just seems to follow me."

"You talk like an educated man."

"I guess I've had a bit of schooling."

She sat there on the floor beside him for a moment, thinking her own thoughts. Then she hopped lightly to her feet. "I'll be back. I want to look around some too."

He lay there alone for a mo-

ment, then started working on his bonds. She sure knew how to tie knots, but he thought maybe in a time he might get one hand free. He'd been at it about five minutes when he heard the scream.

It was a terrifying thing that echoed through the old building, but the most awful part of it was the way it was cut off in the middle, as if some giant hand had closed down forever. There were running footsteps somewhere above him, and after a moment the girl Laura entered from outside. "Who....? God, what was that?"

"Untie me and we'll go see."

She ignored him and ran off toward the back room, which seemed to have been the source of the scream. "What's this, water?" she mumbled from the darkened doorway, and reached for one of the lamps. At the same moment Ben managed to get a hand free. He was already ripping the thongs from his legs when she dropped the lamp and stumbled backward with a choking gasp.

The Indian had appeared from somewhere, and the black-suited Harry. In the sudden confusion they hadn't even noticed he was free. They were clustered around the doorway, where the flickering light from the fallen lamp shone in on a scene from hell.

The bearded Jason was in there, pinned to the wall like some giant butterfly with a shaft of wood and metal. His eyes were open and staring in death, and to Ben it looked as if almost in that last second of life before the shaft pierced his chest he'd seen some great unexpected truth. But the horror of Jason, awful as it was, could be only a part of it. At least a body was something solid, physical. But around the body, covering the floor in irregular puddles, was more water than Ben Snow had seen in days. It was almost as if here, in the middle of the desert, some creature of the sea had appeared to strike down this man.

"What's that thing through his chest?" Harry gasped out.

Ben took a step closer to examine it, carefully avoiding the puddles of water. "It's a harpoon," he answered at last. "Like they use on whales."

And they stood there, looking, not really understanding, because death can never really be understood by those who have yet to experience it. Ben took advantage of the moment to slip the pistol out of Jason's untouched holster. When he turned from the pinned corpse he was covering them with the gun.

"Caah!" the Indian shouted, his hand going for his knife. Ben fired from the hip and nicked his finger. That stopped him, and it stopped the others too.

"Now let's talk," Ben said quietly. "In the other room."

He followed them in and motioned toward chairs. The gun in his hand gave him the old feeling of power. He lit another lamp and sat down opposite them.

"Did you kill Jason?' the black-

suited man asked.

"Hardly. I was still tied up at the time."

"But there's no one else in this damned town."

Ben shrugged casually. "Then it must have been one of you three." He wasn't yet ready to spring the other possibility on them.

The Indian's finger was still bleeding. "No," he said simply. "No kill bearded one."

"See?" Harry said, as if this proved something. "The girl wouldn't have the strength, and I was outside when it happened. Besides, why would we kill him? He was a friend."

Ben scratched his bristled chin. "Maybe I'd be able to answer that one better if I knew what the four of you were doing here."

Harry and the Indian exchanged glances, but neither spoke, Finally, after the silence had become obvious, the girl said, "Well, why not tell him? We've got a murder on our hands now."

"Shut up!" Harry told her.

But she ignored him. "We robbed a train," she told Ben. "Just like that."

"Don't listen to her," Harry insisted. "She's just kidding you."

"Is this kidding?" she asked, suddenly on her feet by the bulging saddle-bags the Indian had brought in. She overturned one and emptied its contents on the dull, sandy floor.

Money, packages of new paper money, tumbled into view. Ben knelt to pick up one, keeping his gun ready. "Big bills," he said. "They'll have the serial numbers listed."

Harry shook his head. "We'll have it spent before they do anything like that. It'll take them a week to get the news across the country. How about it, Snow? We'll cut you in for Jason's share. He sure won't need it."

But Ben wasn't buying. "Sure, it'll take a week! Didn't you damn fools ever hear of the telegraph?"

The Indian said, "We get out now. Split up money."

"In the morning, Redman. That'll be soon enough."

Ben smiled a little. "We may none of us be alive by morning. Unless one of you want to confess killing him."

"Why would we kill him?" the girl asked.

"Money. More money for each of you now. Or perhaps, Miss Laura, he caught you out there and tried to attack you, and you had to kill him."

But she only shook her head, silently. The Indian spoke up again. "Evil spirit kill him. Water spirit."

Ben frowned at the thought. It had to be discussed, at least. "He may not be so wrong. Some say the town is haunted."

"Haunted! By what?" Harry was a true unbeliever. Ben imagined that he questioned anything that wasn't black or white, and that made all the stranger his dress of a Preacher. Or was he a Preacher only when he robbed trains?

Ben shrugged in answer to his question. "We're in a deep valley here. It might even have been a river at one time, emptying into the Gulf of California. Perhaps some time a hundred years ago, a whaling ship made its way this far. . . ."

"Don't give me that crazy talk!"

But Ben could see that it wasn't crazy talk to the Indian. He backed away, then headed for the door, unmindful of the gun Ben still held. He didn't go far. At the doorway he uttered another gasping "Caah!"

"What is it?" Ben called out.

"Evil spirit has stolen horses!"

They all went to look, but of course the Indian spoke the truth. The horses were indeed gone. "There must be someone else here," Harry insisted. "We'll search again. Any of you might have moved the horses," Ben pointed out. "But we'll search. No funny business, though. Remember, I've got my gun back."

"I'll remember that, Snow. You remember my offer of the money. There's still enough for all of us."

"What makes you think I want your money?"

Harry smiled a little, a twisted sort of grimace. "Billy the Kid would have wanted it," he said and walked away.

They took lamps and spread out to search through the ruined buildings for the horses, and Ben found himself somehow teamed up with Laura. "Your brother's a pretty crazy guy," he said as they explored the big barn that might have been a stable once.

"He's all right."

"Sure. All train robbers are."

"He had a hard childhood."

"Didn't you have, too?"

She hesitated. "Yes. I guess girls can take it a little better than boys."

"Why's he wear the black suit?"

"He studied for the ministry once. Really. They threw him out because he drank. He was wearing the suit on the train so he could get into the money car without arousing too much suspicion."

"Did he kill anyone on the train?"

"No. The Indian stabbed a guard, but I don't think he killed him."

"How much money is there?"

"We're not sure. A lot of it. Over a hundred thousand dollars, on its way to west coast banks."

He thought about that. It was a lot. With a quarter of it he could stop running from those who would make him a gunfighter. He could move to San Francisco, or back east to St. Louis. He realized suddenly that Laura was saying something. "What?"

"You and I. We could take the whole thing."

She'd really said it—his ears weren't deceiving him. "You'd double-cross your own brother?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "I don't owe him anything."

"We wouldn't get far without horses." He paused, then added casually, "Unless you hid them

somewhere."

"How could I? You're right, of course. It's crazy." She'd been standing close to him. Now, in the shadow, she leaned her body against his and kissed him. Before he could do more than respond briefly, there was the sound of voices from outside.

"They're looking for us," he said, breaking away.

They went out to the darkness, where Harry and the Indian were waiting with swinging lanterns. "The harpoon's gone," Harry told them. "Someone took it out of Jason's body." He was scared.

Ben broke into a trot as he headed back to the building, feeling the reassuring slap of holster against thigh. Whether human or ghost, the murderer had retrieved his weapon. That could only mean he intended to use it again.

The bearded corpse was on the floor now, tumbled there by someone or something. Where the harpoon had been, there was now only a ragged, running wound, and the blood that had held back so long was now covering the floor to mix with the dampness and the puddled water. "Neither of you saw anything?" Ben asked them. "Where were you—together?"

"No. I was upstairs and the Indian was across the street. He came over and found it, then called me."

Ben turned to the red man. "Well? You didn't see anything, I suppose."

The Indian shook his head. "Found water," he said, with a bit of pride.

"Water?"

Ben followed him out the back door. Sure enough, a large rain barrel sat there, with an inch or two of water still in the bottom. Rain came rarely to the region, but there'd been a few heavy downpours in recent weeks, enough to explain the water. Now all he had to explain was why the ghost—or Jason—had splashed it over the floor inside. It seemed like a wasted effort if its only reason was to heighten the effect of the harpoon as a weapon. Besides, if the ghost wanted them to leave, why steal their horses and make escape impossible? No, the more he thought about it, the more certain he became that one of them was the ghostly killer, looking for a larger share of the loot.

"Is someone watching the money?" he asked.

"I hid it under the stairs," Harry said. "It's safe."

They went back outside, where the night wind was beginning to pick up. Eddying sand cast strange patterns over the almost-street, and now the stars were beginning to appear from behind the dispersing clouds. Ben thought he heard the distant whinnying of horses, but he could not be sure. It might only have been a trick of the wind.

"O.K.," he told them. "We split up again and keep searching. Laura, go in with the money and sit tight. If anything suspicious happens, start blasting away with

that rifle of yours."

"I want to go with you," she said.

"No." He had a feeling he could force one of the others to show his hand if he was alone. With Laura along, the killer wouldn't be likely to appear.

He left them and went off by himself, this time along the back of the line of tottering structures. He held his lantern close to the ground, searching for hoof marks in the sandy soil. But there was nothing that could certainly be distinguished in this light.

He'd been moving along the street about five minutes when he became conscious of someone following him. Laura, perhaps. He doubted if the Indian would make that vague shuffling sound on sand. But he couldn't take the chance. He left the lantern propped on a fallen timber and moved out of its yellow circle of light.

Someone, across the circle from him. Someone, stalking him as Jason might have been stalked. He drew his gun carefully and waited, certain that he was as invisible as the other. But then, hadn't Jason been invisible too?

Suddenly, off to the right, there appeared a tiny spot of glowing fire. It might have been a star fallen to earth, or the frozen burst of a pale rocket. It might even have been the ghost of Raindeer, if Ben Snow believed in such things. He turned his gun to aim at the strangely glowing spot, but the movement that had intruded his conscious originally now seemed to blur in the darkness to his left. There was the crunching thud of blade against flesh and bone, and the glow vanished before Ben's eyes.

He circled the lighted area, and now with it behind him the stars cast a pale glow over the scene. A thing, something bulky, curled into itself in the dust, and ahead were the running footsteps of a murderer. Ben knelt for an instant in the spreading blood, trying to pull the harpoon free, but it was too late. The man before him was the Indian, and he was dead.

Now Ben was running too, in the direction of the retreating footsteps, down between the darkly dead buildings that sometimes leaned too far out at him. Silently, without a shouted warning or a shot. But Ben kept his gun ready, running with it held high.

The other, desperately, leaped onto a creaking wooden porch, then into one of the buildings where even the stars could not reveal him. Ben followed.

And there, just inside the black door, was the glow of light—the ghost?—again. This time Ben did not hesitate. He fired twice from the hip, and the glow dissolved in a splintering crash.

A mirror! He looked down at his chest, his stomach, and realized suddenly that the glow was upon him! He was standing there in the void, a perfect target for

the ghostly killer.

He threw himself to the floor as a gun blazed out, tearing through the loose cloth of his shirt. Ben answered the weapon's flash with his remaining four bullets.

For a long time silence settled like the dust about him. He waited for more shots, his glowing stomach pressed against the protecting floor. But none came. Presently there was the noise of cautious arrival in the doorway behind him. Harry and Laura were there, with lamps. "What in hell happened? You all right?"

"I think so," Ben said, getting to one knee. "Shine the light over there."

"God! You got him, whoever it was."

Ben walked over and kicked at the body with his toe. The face, in death distorted, was still familiar. It was the face of the sheepman who'd warned him about the town only a few hours earlier.

"There's your murderer," Ben said. "He killed Jason and the Indian. He's a sheepman from over the next hill."

"You're a good shot," Laura said. "Even in the dark."

"Especially in the dark. If I'd thought about it, I'd have known it was the sheepman, of course. He's the one who tried to tell me the town was haunted, to keep me away. And the water in the room where Jason was killed—there had to be a reason for it after. I thought about it, but that crazy harpoon misled me. The water was simply an attempt to wash the floor, to clean up some possible clue to his identity. Jason found him there, waiting to claim his first victim, and the sheepman killed him with the harpoon, just as he killed the Indian a while ago."

Harry shrugged. "The Indian is no great loss. It's just one less cut on the money. But what clue could sheepman have left on the floor?"

"Something he feared any of us would recognize. Probably dirt and manure, the odor, the stink of sheep. I don't say I would have recognized the smell, but he must have feared we might. Those sheepman have queer ideas sometimes about us, like we belong to a different world."

They left the body there, and went back to the building which had once been a bar. "What about the horses?" Laura asked.

"I imagine they're over the hill, with his sheep. We'll go look."

"First we split the money," Harry said, kneeling in his black pants by the Indian's saddle-bags. "This'll be easy money for you, Snow. Damned easy!"

"I'm not taking any money," Ben said.

"Hell, I didn't mean you haven't earned it. You killed that sheepman if nothing else. Killed him before he killed all of us. What was he—crazy or something?"

"Crazy with an odd form of in-

sanity, I think," Ben answered slowly. He picked up the lamp and carefully blew out its flickering blue flame, plunging them into darkness. Across the pile of stacked-up currency, another fiery spot glowed brightly. This time it was not a reflection.

"What in hell'd you do that for?" Harry gasped out.

"I had to see if you had one too," Ben sighed into the unseen.

A revolver exploded next to his ear and the burning spot went out, like a star blotted by clouds. Harry the Preacher screeched once and fell against Ben, knocking his already drawn gun out of line.

Then Laura was lighting the lamp again, covering Ben with the steady gun of a girl who has just killed her brother. "You're smart," she said. "Too smart."

"I've got a gun too, Laura," he said, keeping it pointed at her, remembering even as he did that he hadn't reloaded it since killing the sheepman.

"How'd you know?" she said, keeping her weapon where it was as they faced each other kneeling, a few feet apart, with the lamp and the money and her brother on the floor between them.

"The sheepman had to have a motive. He warned me away, but that was before you people arrived. If he was expecting you, someone must have told him. Someone must have told him about the money. He killed Jason in the dark with that harpoon—where'd he get that, in one of the buildings here?—and it was a good weapon for scaring people away. But he did kill him in the dark, and he killed the Indian in the dark, but not before I'd seen a glowing spot on the Indian's shirt, making the target like a light—and there was one on your brother. It's a little dab of phosphorous, a chemical that glows in the dark. If I wasn't developing a spreading stomach, I'd have noticed it at once on my belt buckle. Since the sheepman could hardly have put it on us all, he must have had an accomplice who did—the same person that told him about the planned train robbery and the money. You, Laura."

"Why me?" Her face was hard in the glow.

"None of the others had the opportunity. You tied me up—but I imagine it was when you kissed me that you dabbed my buckle."

"Put away your gun and we can talk," she said. "They're all dead now. There's just you and me."

He shook his head. "The gun stays out. Maybe you think you can shoot me before I get off a shot myself. Maybe you'd like to try."

"The money's there for both of us."

"And now that your boyfriend's dead I'll do for a companion—is that it? No thanks. I'm sure you wouldn't value me any higher than your own brother, and look what happened to him."

"I never owed him anything."

"No, but you gave him something. A bullet."

She was staring into his eyes now. "Put down that gun. You wouldn't shoot a woman, would you?"

"That depends on whether or not I'm really Billy the Kid. Under the circumstances, I think Billy would shoot a woman."

She thought about this a moment longer, then said, "All right, we'll throw down our guns together. Then we can talk about the money."

"Agreed," Ben nodded. The two guns hit the floor with a clatter together. "Now what?"

"If you won't come with me, we can split the money here and go our own ways."

But now Ben shook his head. "I'm taking the money into town, to turn it over to the sheriff. I think you'd better come too."

She cursed softly and made a dive for the gun, but Ben had it first. She grabbed up his, squeezed the trigger twice, then hurled it at his head when nothing happened. "Damn you, cowboy! Shoot me if you want!" Then her hand clutched the lamp, and she hurled this too. It shattered against the far wall, and in a moment the bone-dry timbers were ablaze.

"You little fool!" Ben holstered her gun and tried to catch her, but she was too quick, rolling away from him, jumping lightly to her feet and running toward the stairs. The entire wall was now ablaze, lighting the place with a sort of dangerous, flickering daylight. Hot, like the desert sun.

She must have been trying to reach an upstairs window, where she might have dropped to the ground and escaped in the night. But she couldn't know that the fast-rushing flames had already weakened the ancient timbers. The whole stairway started to go at once, and the flames received it like wood on a campfire. She screamed, and then vanished into the spreading inferno....

Ben just had time to pull the saddle-bags full of money into the street. Then, by the light of the leaping flames, he made his way back over the hill to the place where he found the missing horses, tied among the restless sheep. He took his and turned the others free, and rode back for a time the way he had come, until the first rays of morning could guide him on a route around the ghost town.

Somewhere, far ahead, he'd find a town and a sheriff, and leave the money without explanation. And keep riding. Let others find the burnt-out ruins of the town, and the five bodies scattered there.

It was really a ghost town now.

He wondered where it had ever gotten the name of Raindeer....

(Continued from other side)

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